



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



3 3433 07604953 9

AUNT SARAH

A MOTHER OF NEW ENGLAND

BY

AGNES LOUISE PRATT

1. Fiction, American

NBO

100

1. Fiction, American

168

168

NBO

Ref

AUNT SARAH

A Mother of New England

By

AGNES LOUISE PRATT

Author of "The Looms of Fate," "Oakwood," and
"The City Beyond"

+



Boston: Richard G. Badger

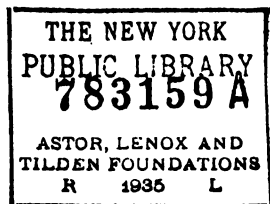
The Gorham Press

1906

613

COPYRIGHT 1906 by AGNES L. PRATT.

All rights reserved



PRINTED AT
THE GORHAM PRESS
BOSTON, U. S. A.

ROY W. B.
CLARK
1935

TO THE MEMORY OF MY UNCLE
DR. DAVID C. PRATT
WHO GAVE HIS LIFE FOR HIS COUNTRY
BEFORE I WAS BORN
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
BY THE AUTHOR
AGNES LOUISE PRATT

WOR 20 JUN 3 4



Aunt Sarah

CHAPTER I

EVERY road, for miles around the village of Woodley Centre, led to the little white school-house on the brow of the hill, whose many paned windows glowed with a light that threw long shadows down the path leading to its doorway. Within, a genial warmth diffused itself from the great box stove piled full of four-foot logs, and standing with its legs firmly imbedded in a box of ashes, for the safety of the schoolroom floor and the convenience of the expectorating half of the population.

An air of festivity, unwonted as it was tangible, seemed to pervade the atmosphere within the dingy walls of the structure, the primary object of whose construction had been the education of the youth of the village, but whose use had been variously perverted to gatherings of a religious, political, or social order.

There was no one in sight in the brightly lighted room; but presently an animated woodpile seemed to enter at the door leading up from the cellar. With the exception of a pair of sturdy legs encased in voluminous trousers, tucked carelessly into two heavy, well greased, long-legged boots, and two coat sleeves from which a pair of red, protruding hands wound themselves tightly about their burden, the whole

figure seemed to be composed of great sticks of wood, piled one above the other. There was no head visible, though a shaggy fur cap reposed insecurely on the now tottering accumulation of fuel. The immense woodbox at one side of the hissing stove yawned to receive this generous tribute to its capacity.

The body behind the stack braced itself involuntarily to support the fast disintegrating mass of cord wood, then lurched unsteadily, tripped by a big nail in one of the loose boards of the well-worn floor, and came ignominiously down, the under dog, as he always was, in all the affairs of this life.

"Wal, I swan —"

He crept from under the heap of logs and shook himself free of the bits of bark and sawdust that clung to his person, disclosing a ruddy countenance of large dimensions, whose features at present expressed as much of chagrin as anger at his awkward mishap.

"That couldn't of happened agin in a hunderd years," he muttered, below his breath, as he stooped to take up the sticks again gingerly, one by one, and pile them on his arm.

"In union there is strength," sang out a gay voice from the doorway, "while your sticks held together, Ephraim, they balanced nicely, but just as soon as one was dislodged, they all tumbled at once."

Ephraim Binks looked up. Framed by the doorway, a half-a-dozen young girls stood, their cheeks reddened by the chill autumn winds that blew outside, in their eyes shining the merriment occasioned by the mishap that had befallen him. His face grew more rubicund and his breath came in stertorous gasps.

"Did ye see me?" he stammered, dropping in his confusion more sticks.

"See you? Of course we did, and heard you, too. 'Great was the fall thereof.'" All the girls tittered at this. Then she who had spoken first addressed the bashful youth again.

"Come, Ephraim," she said, not unkindly, though her voice still trembled with suppressed merriment, as she surveyed the rueful figure beneath the huge pile of sticks he was again enfolding on both outstretched arms, "come, Ephraim, hurry up, or you'll never get that wood into the woodbox. The floor will need sweeping, too, after this" as she noted the dust and bits of bark he had scattered far and wide.

"You—you're airy," he panted, as he walked cautiously with his load toward the woodbox. The rest of the girls were removing their heavier outer garments in the little entry outside and still going off into peals of laughter reminiscent of the ludicrous figure that had sprawled over the floor when they entered. The one to whom he had spoken replied mischievously, "Yes, we came early,—to see the fun."

"I guess you did," and he piloted himself carefully around the corner of the box of ashes beneath the stove.

"Oh, Ephraim—take care!" a sweet voice called warningly, as the toe of the unfortunate's heavy boot struck the sharp corner of the box unexpectedly, causing him to pitch forward at an undignified angle and dislodge half the sticks he was carrying. Down they crashed, over the red-hot stove and the floor.

"Maybe I'd better leave the room," his tormentor suggested and, humming a song whose sentiment was "we know no north, we know no south," she turned to join her friends in the doorway.

A long ray from the oil lamp on the teacher's desk fell over her face, illumining it for an instant, and throwing into strong relief its salient points. A flowing scarf of fluffy worsted, white in color with a border of richest crimson, surmounted the soft waves of her chestnutty hair, allowed to fall smoothly about the ears, thus draping the contour of the face appropriately. The narrow white parting in the centre of these deeply tinted masses led straight from the line of the Grecian nose to the crown of her well shaped head. The eyes were hazel, but now brimming over with hardly concealed amusement, shone starry and scintillant in the radiance that fell on them from the lamp. If there was an incongruous feature in the symmetry of the countenance, it was the mouth. The cheeks were full and round, and already taking on a deeper flush from the heat that filled the room; the chin strong and well molded, and the neck, where it rose from the turned away lace collar fastened with an immense cameo, smooth and supple. But the mouth, perhaps from its very lack of affiliation with the remainder of the features, gave the countenance its strength. It was wide in proportion to the rest of the face, firm lipped, and with an unbroken straightness of outline that would better have become the face of a statesman than that of a merry maiden of nineteen summers. Perhaps its quiet gravity, in deep contrast with the gaiety of the rest of the face, foreboded the future that already loomed only a little way ahead over the pathway of life.

With a muttered exclamation of real vexation, Ephraim Binks stooped to reclaim the lost sticks, and having at last stowed them safely in the woodbox, started for the cellarway and the broom, to repair the damage he had done.

One of the girls called out, "Look out, Ephraim, don't fall down cellar," and she of the chestnutty locks and hazel eyes spoke quickly.

"Don't, Martha, please! I think we've plagued him enough already. I am always sorry when I assist at any of his downfalls," and there was real commiseration in her voice.

"And yet," slyly came from another of her companions, "you are always the ringleader, always ready, in spite of your somewhat delayed repentance, Hope Hamilton, to laugh at him again."

"I know it," and a gleam of momentary mirth flashed in her eye, "he is so awkward and so bashful, that it tempts me," with the soft sigh of an accusing conscience.

Ephraim Binks, in the cellarway, dark and damp, was attempting to dislodge the broom from its nail, and muttering to himself vigorously.

"Gosh dang them gals," he jerked out, as the broom refused to be loosened, "I wisht they'd stay away from here till it was time to come. They allus comes airy, an' I bleeve 'pon my soul," with sudden conviction, as the broom detached itself from the nail and, dropping down, gave him a vicious rap on the forehead, "they do it a purpose."

A slow step sounded behind him and a grave voice asked, "What you doing here, Eph? Can't you find the broom?"

He turned to confront a tall, grave-visaged young man with soft, dark eyes and hair. "That you, Phil? Gosh dang it all! the broom's found me all right ef I hain't it," and he emerged from the doorway rubbing the lump on his forehead with one hand while he held the refractory broom with the other. Phil Marsh laughed quietly.

"Oh, come along," he said, "get the floor swept. They'll all be here before you know it. There's a lot here now. It'll be time to begin soon."

"I know it," and Ephraim went to work vigorously with the broom.

One by one the villagers dropped in. A few of the men, headed by Nathan Drake, one of the most prominent members of the board of selectmen, gathered about the stove in one corner, and began to talk in low tones of the political situation at Washington, for it was the fall of '60, and there was plenty of food for discussion and reflection.

Solomon Penny, who kept the one store the village boasted, was the possessor of a peculiarly raucous, far-reaching voice, so that his opinions were plainly audible in the farthest corners of the edifice. A few women had gathered in the scholars' seats and were discussing among themselves, with much animation, the best way for making dried apple.

"I always dry a few pieces of sweetin's with mine," volunteered Hannah Penny, who was as meek and retiring generally as her husband was loud and aggressive; "it saves sugar, when you're makin' pies, an' sugar, you know, is risin'." She nodded significantly over to 'Mandy Abbot, wife of another of the selectmen, and she returned the salutation vigorously.

"Wal, I sh'd jest think so! Last time Eli bought any, we only got seven pounds. Think of it! In my mind, it shows thet somethin's bound to happen."

"That's so," in a chorus. And then someone whispered: "Hush, here comes the schoolmarster! The spellin's goin' to begin."

A tall, cadaverous-looking young man in a long, loosely fitting coat of ministerial black, entered the doorway with a book under his arm and went directly

to the desk on the platform, where he took his seat, touching the little bell at his elbow softly as he did so, to enforce attention.

John Sherburne "boarded 'round," for in this village the custom had not yet passed into deserved desuetude, and it was very evident that the change of diet, recurring at such frequent intervals, was not a success in his case, for he was emaciated and dyspeptic-appearing to an extreme degree. Never a smile rippled the long, straight lines of his countenance. He listened to everything, marriage bells and funeral knells, with the same solemnity, a solemnity that seemed unnatural and ill befitting so youthful a man.

He announced that in the absence of a clergyman he should himself open the evening's entertainment with a short prayer, which he proceeded to do amid a subdued rustling of skirts, arrangement of crinoline, and shuffling of heavy boots from the masculine contingent, who had abandoned their political talk at its very climax, and filed decorously to their seats in deference to the tap of the bell under the hand of the schoolmaster.

The prayer finished, a little bustle of expectancy arose.

Then the schoolmaster spoke. "I have selected," he said, "since it was left to me to lead this evening's spelling match, these persons, to choose sides: Mr. Francis Marsh, Miss Hope Hamilton."

Unconscious of anything in his choice to cause comment, he reseated himself, open book in hand, and beamed benignantly, in a fatherly fashion unsuited to his boyish features, on the assembled audience. Heretofore they had rejoiced in a variety of ways of choosing whom they would have to lead the contests which were held regularly in cold weather in the little school-

house, sometimes by lot, sometimes by voluntary service, and sometimes by vote of those taking part. But this had consumed too much time, and all had agreed to defer to the judgment and selection of him whom they had chosen to teach their young.

Someone coughed significantly. Then a suppressed murmur, a sort of mute laughter, convulsed all present, but the leaders selected still retained their seats. Presently the silence grew oppressive. In the midst of it, with reddening cheeks, and eyes flashing with merriment, as if she, too, at last apprehended the cause of the quiet chuckling she heard all about her and was determined to accept it in the spirit in which it was uttered, one of harmless raillery, Hope Hamilton rose and walked steadily to her position at the end of the long platform surrounding the seats, nearest the teacher's desk.

A young man in dark clothes, of superior cut and fit to those of his neighbors, sprang suddenly up from the desk where he was sitting, and went to the left of the master's desk, where he stood expectantly, waiting for the young lady opposite to make the first choice of supporters. The too evident raillery of his townspeople had not reddened his cheeks a whit. He was pale, brown eyed and dark haired, very tall, and of slight though symmetrical build. The most trifling stoop to the shoulders betrayed the man of studious habits as well as the weakness of chest from which he had always suffered.

The momentary jollity emanating from the seats of the spectators was now replaced by an air of nervous expectancy as they waited to see whose name would be first to be called. In clear, well-modulated tones, Hope Hamilton enunciated the name of her first assistant in the art of orthography.

"Ephraim Binks."

The tension that had held the people assembled loosened a bit as their emotions found vent in a hearty laugh, silenced almost before its initiative guffaw had died away by the tiny tinkle of the schoolmaster's bell and the look of stern disapproval on his face.

Ephraim Binks rose from his seat with flaming face, his hands working nervously at his sides, both eyes squinted tightly as if the light on the schoolmaster's desk had been a great sun instead of the insignificant oil lamp it was. He started at the head of the long aisle to come forward, and stumbled along blindly, dazzled by the light or something equally as intense. Half-way down the aisle, Solomon Penny, the village storekeeper, sat. With one quick motion he thrust out his heavily booted foot into space. Unheeding all save the goal for which he was speeding, Ephraim passed along. His foot met the obstacle, it overcame him, and with outstretched arms he sprawled down the aisle, a hand on the desk at either side, and his face deflected from its original direction, so that his chin was propped up on the back of the seat nearest him. It was the signal for another laugh, checked by a warning glance from John Sherburne's eyes, into a flitting smile that died quite away behind poor Ephraim's back.

The innate kindliness of the hearts assembled there triumphed for that once over their natural tastes for bucolic mirth, and, gathering himself together with an effort, he proceeded to his place in line, happy in the thought that his mishap had passed unnoticed in the suddenly aroused interest of "choosing sides."

Francis Marsh made his first choice among the elder people present, calling Mrs. Penny to his side.

After that, names were spoken rapidly. Very few refused, for the entire fun of the spelling match consisted in the hearty coöperation of all present, and depended as much on the ludicrous mistakes consummated by some as anything else for its success.

John Sherburne sat bolt upright, holding the spelling book in his hand. When the long lines on either side of his desk were in perfect readiness, he inclined his head slightly toward Hope Hamilton and gave out the first word, "ambrosial."

He had begun at the "A's" and evidently intended to arouse some sharp competition between the two sides of the contest. To Francis Marsh, on the other side, he gave "argillaceous," and it was, as he supposed it would be, spelled correctly. With an impartiality that was almost chilling, he turned to Ephraim Binks with "ascetic."

The sunset red flamed up into Ephraim's cheeks again as he essayed to enunciate.

"A-s, a-s," he mumbled twice, hesitated, and then, plunged boldly, as he would do in after years, to his unbounded credit, into the very midst of the disheartening conflict. "As-set-tick," he delivered rapidly, in tones of thunder. Then he looked around hopefully for confirmation and applause. A roar of laughter, unconfined this time, greeted his ears. Even John Sherburne smiled, the wan ghost of a smile, as he said, slowly, "Wrong, Ephraim. Next."

With heavy step Ephraim stamped down from the platform and to his seat, undismayed by his failure, his red face shining still with the unwonted effort and the heat of the room. But he was not left long alone. One after another, fathers and mothers of Woodley Centre, went down before the unerring shots of orthography hurled with telling effect by the grave-faced schoolmaster.

Francis Marsh surrendered smilingly to "resuscitative," omitting the "c"; and Hope Hamilton shortly afterward, in an unguarded moment, stumbled ignominiously over the intricacies of "seismography," and retired to her seat, leaving but two combatants in the field, Phil Marsh and her friend and school-mate, Laura Grahame. They contested stubbornly for the trophy of the class, a pretty volume of the poems of Tom Moore, with green and gilt binding, and finally fought off the tie on the simple word "frieze," before which Phil Marsh's batteries were silenced, and he gracefully abdicated in favor of the young lady who had persistently maintained her supremacy in the face of all her townspeople.

With great jollity and good feeling, the assembly broke up, after appointing another session for two weeks from that night, and leaving their elders to take up the broken thread of political discourse around the dying embers of the fire in the old box stove. The younger men hastily donned overcoats and hats and formed two lines on either side of the doorway of the schoolhouse. The elder women indulgently discussed the relative merits of hardhack tea and thoroughwort, while waiting for their recalcitrant spouses. Like a flock of chattering birds, the younger girls lingered in the little entry, throwing on shawls at a more becoming angle across plump shoulders or fastening little folds in the entrancing conceits of fluffy worsted they wore above the soft bands of their hair. As they emerged in a bevy from the doorway, the light fell first athwart the rugged face of Ephraim Binks. He scanned the flock eagerly, rejecting, with deprecating glances, each pretty girl as she came in sight, until, toward the rear, he spied the one for whom he was looking.

"Can I see you home, 'Scilla?" he asked, humbly.

A pert body, in a gorgeous shawl, answered him.

"No, you cayn't. So now, Smarty."

"All right," sturdily, and, mumbling scornfully to himself, "'cause I tumbled down, I swan to gracious," he stamped away down the road and the top of his cap was soon lost to view over the brow of the hill.

Hope Hamilton walked with steady tread all down the long line, her equanimity not disturbed by the admiring glances cast at her by dozens of sheepish eyes. Apart from the rest and a little in the shadow, Francis Marsh waited. Without a word he took her hand, tucked it under his arm, and together they went down the winding country road, dark save for the starshine above. It was a beautiful night, clear and cloudless, and across the hill they were descending a brisk breeze blew, just enough to stir the soft tendrils of dark brown hair lying unconfined on the girl's white forehead. Here and there little lights twinkled in the windows of their neighbors' houses. Once they passed a field whose dying cornstalks rustled and crackled strangely in the passing wind. Away off in the distance they could discern the dark pine woods against the jeweled brightness of the sky, acres and acres of them, some the property of her father, some of his, both prosperous farmers.

They said little until they had reached the broad, square house where she lived. Then he just touched the hand she laid on the swinging gate, arresting her in her onward walk.

"I have decided," he said, gravely, "that I will go back to school."

Her heart gave a sudden disappointed throb.

"Then you cannot give up the profession?" she said, half chidingly.

"No. I tried it. I did not begin with my class in September. But," eagerly, "I have kept up with them—I have studied—and—and—I am going back."

"And your father? Your mother?"

"Mother always wanted me to go, anyway. She understands me," his eyes were shining, "and father—well, you see," he laughed a little, "he is disappointed. He wanted both of us at home, with him, but he sees that I am a poor farmer—I shall never be any better—and so—he has consented."

"Well," she sighed softly, "I suppose it is for the best. Everything is. We all wanted you to stay and be like us. I am afraid, Francis," doubtfully, "you will grow away from us."

"Never—from you."

He looked down at her fondly and she returned the gaze with loving, trustful eyes. "Our promise, you know," he said gravely, solemnly almost, "is a sacred one, and not to be broken lightly. It will be years, maybe, before I shall reach the goal. But when I come back, for good—as I surely will—it will be for you, too."

Then he stooped and kissed her. And the light of the starshine fell over both their faces, glorifying the sentiments shining there.

She spoke a hurried "good night," gave him a soft pressure of the hand, and stood a moment silently by the gate, until his figure was lost in the gathering shadows and the echo of his steady tread died away on the far vibrations of the night air,

CHAPTER II

THE Marsh farm was situated due south from the little white schoolhouse on the hillside, in a direct line down the winding yellow turnpike, and occupied the whole of a most fertile tract of low lying land. Abel Marsh had come to Woodley Centre from what were then the wilds of Maine when he was still a young man, and had, by perseverance and untiring industry, laid by a comfortable sum of money. To this he had added by marriage with one of the village girls who was also the possessor of a snug competence for those days. They had gone to housekeeping, farther up the hill, in a less pretentious house, with only a few acres of land whose tillage he had alternated with shoemaking in one of the upper rooms, very much to his own profit in matters temporal.

With the advent of their two sons, and with a perfectly laudable desire to make of both of them as good citizens and as hard workers as he himself was, he had betaken himself and his growing family to the house they now occupied, a broad structure with a door in the centre, whose roof, topped by an immense stone chimney, slanted apparently nearly to the level of the road. It was white and the tiny panes of its narrow windows reflected the morning sun in its front or living rooms, while the windows of the yawning kitchen were reddened daily by the flaming torches of expiring daylight.

The house itself was very near the broad, dusty highway, separated only from its yellow dustiness in

summer and its great white snowdrifts in winter time by a neat picket fence and a narrow plot of grass, within whose confines bloomed, in season, phlox, dahlias, pinks, and those drooping flowers of purple hue which to the common people were known as "widow's tears." In one corner an old-fashioned cinnamon rose flourished and luxuriated, wild and unconfined, over the supporting strength of the sturdy fence.

To the left the yard was all open. In the rear an immense barn, carriage houses, and the corn crib obliterated the view of the little hill behind, whose crest was surmounted with nicely constructed houses for the poultry. There were always piles of carefully sawed pine and cedar wood along the side of the road, for Abel Marsh had appended the sale of wood and fence rails to his other industries, with good results.

The elder Marsh was a stout, rubicund, florid-faced, broad-shouldered farmer of the bluff and hearty type, with not an ambition above his farm. If his stock were well fed and watered, his crops carefully and safely housed, and his table supplied bountifully with sustaining food, he could retire to rest, when the poultry went to roost, with a clear conscience, and enjoy as dreamless a sleep as ever blessed an infant's eyelids. Likewise, he had no ambition for his boys above his own. What had been good enough for him was equally as satisfactory for them, in his estimation.

The elder, Philip, now a young man of twenty-four, agreed with his father, and, though he had received a good education at an academy in a neighboring town, was contented to return and take his place and fill it on the farm. But there were depths in Phil Marsh's character, unstirred, undreamed of

as yet. To the younger, Francis, who was barely twenty-one, the little glimpses of the outside world that had been vouchsafed to him while at school had proved alluring, and, while he was a perfectly obedient son and reasonable in all things, he chafed not a little at the dull routine of farm life.

He wanted to be a physician. He saw endless possibilities in the profession for advancement and service to his fellow men, and the wide reading and association with people of culture to which his college course would entitle him were a potent fascination.

Outwardly yielding to his father's wishes, he had returned to the farm the previous summer. But he could not drop the books, and when the school where he hoped to be matriculated opened its doors in the fall without him, he returned to his studies in the solitude of his own room, and kept steady pace with what he knew his class were doing. His father fumed and fretted.

"He needs the fresh air," he protested, "an' the work on the farm will make a man o' him. He'll never git rich bein' a doctor. I've giv'n both my boys a good chance in the world, an' I can leave 'em enough to make more with. I want him on the farm—to home. Look at his stoop shoulders an' his pale face! Let 'im go back? Not ef I know it."

But the fates were inexorable, and there was a power behind the throne in the Marsh homestead. Sarah Marsh knew of her boy's ambition and she sympathized with it. By what means did she attain her object and the necessary funds for its furtherance, does not appear on the surface, so silently was it done; but that it had been accomplished was evidenced by the bustle and air of suppressed excitement that pervaded the wide kitchen, as well as the numer-

ous savory odors emanating therefrom one morning, about a week after the night of the spelling match.

Over a fat turkey, whose legs projected stiffly into space, Mrs. Marsh was bending with needle and dangling white cord in one hand, while with the other and a long iron spoon she crowded quantities of savory dressing into the capacious interior of the fowl. In one corner of the kitchen, 'Scilla Hickins, the hired girl, was washing dishes.

"'Scilla."

"Ma'am," obediently.

"Go an' tell Ephraim to go through the cellar an' bring me them apples that stand at the foot o' the stairs."

'Scilla raised a pair of red and very grimy arms from the dishpan and, throwing one corner of her apron around her head, disappeared outside the kitchen door. On the low stone doorstep she paused a moment, though the rough wind blew saucily in her face.

"Mr. Binks — Mr. Binks — Ephraim!" she screamed, shrilly.

"Wal — here I be. What's wanted?"

Around the corner of the corn crib came a sturdy figure, clad in faded blue overalls and a rough jacket, on his head an old straw hat, his hands encased in a pair of blue yarn mittens.

"Wal — what do ye want?" he demanded, again, when the girl did not reply.

"You wait here a minute, an' I'll tell ye. Be sure an' stan' stock still."

"All right," patiently.

He would have stood there until he was metamorphosed into a graven image, had 'Scilla commanded it.

She turned away and re-entered the house. After

a few moments the bulkhead slowly arose from its fastenings and the head of 'Scilla showed through the opening.

"Come here," she called, beckoning him, mysteriously.

He clambered down the stone steps into the cellar with alacrity. At the foot of the stairs stood 'Scilla, smiling impenetrably.

"Mis' Marsh wants you to take them apples an' bring 'em up, by the stairs, mind, into the kitchen."

"Gie me a kiss, 'Scilla."

He made a forward movement, as if to grasp the girl's red, water-soaked hand, hanging limply at her side.

"Ketch me first," she cried, darting up the dark stairway.

He seized the basket of apples, balanced them on his arm, and sprang up the stairway after her. The first two steps, and the next three, he covered with two great strides. Then something, a string fastened tightly though invisibly across the stairs, caught his ankle and he tripped. Part of the apples rolled back down the stairway into the cellar. The rest, with the basket, were overturned and, accompanied by the burly figure of Ephraim, came tumbling through the open door into the kitchen.

"Ephrum Binks! Will you never learn nothin'? Land sakes! How you scairt me!" and Mrs. Marsh sank limply into a chair. Ephraim arose to his feet and, shaking one finger at 'Scilla, who was demurely washing dishes at the sink, gasped, "You hadn't orter blame me, Mis' Marsh. She done it. Yes, she did," as the girl made a gesture of dissent, "she tied a string 'crosst the stairs—it's there yit."

"Then, 'Scilla Hickins," severely, "you git right down them stairs an' git thet string out o' the way 'fore any o' the rest o' the men folks breaks their necks, an' pick up the rest of them apples. Ephrum, you kin go. I sh'd think you'd be 'shamed to plague that poor feller so. He hain't harmed you 's I kin see," and the good woman went back to her pies and cakes.

"Hain't he?" and 'Scilla's black eyes sparkled with mischief as she went obediently down cellar to remove the offending string.

After the noonday meal the house began to take on a holiday air. The curtains in the parlor were rolled up and tied in the centre with the big green worsted tassels that hung ready for service, disclosing to passersby the sheer, embroidered muslin with which the windows were draped. Great, heavy chairs of solid mahogany, upholstered in slippery haircloth, were lined stiffly up against the light wall paper, their feet resting on a gorgeous carpet of heavy brussels, whose design reminded the incomer, on entering, of some immense flower garden whose seeds had been mixed indiscriminately before planting. An unwieldy sofa occupied the position of honor in one corner of the room, its back straight against the wall.

The table of shiny mahogany like the rest of the furniture, was moved between the two front windows and held, as its only ornament, an extremely tall and slender brass lamp, whose diminutive bowl was surrounded with cut-glass prisms, resolving each ray of light, as it passed through them, into its primary colors, a brilliant spot of radiance in the otherwise dull room.

On the shelf were two tall black marble vases, holding some waving plumes of feathery grass that

had been crystallized in alum, a candlestick of polished brass with a genuine wax candle, and a huge conch shell, whose echoing murmur one could almost hear in the stillness.

Sarah Marsh had invited some of the young people of Woodley Centre to spend this last afternoon and evening with her son, before his departure for school; and, as was usual on such occasions, the best room was made ready and opened. The sitting-room, on the other side of the front entrance, was much pleasanter, because it showed the homely uses to which it had been put, with its faded rag carpet, on which the sun was allowed to shine, and the few bright braided rugs scattered here and there; but in this room the table had been set with fine white linen and the green and gilt china service which she had brought with her into her husband's house.

Presently the guests began to arrive. 'Scilla Hickins, resplendent in a new red merino dress, which disagreed somewhat, as to shade, with her ruddy cheeks, met them at the door and ushered the young ladies into the "parlor bedroom," where they laid aside their wraps. Ephraim Binks, in his Sunday clothes, his boots greased till they surpassed in polish even his shining hair, which 'Scilla had just informed him looked "ez if a bar hed licked it," hovered nervously in the background, so fearful of committing a blunder, under the eyes of his inamorata, that he was morally certain to do so sooner or later.

The gathering was small but representative. John Sherburne, grave as he deemed necessary for one who was to follow the holy calling he had in contemplation, but who could occasionally flash out into beaming cheerfulness, stood near the door in earnest conversation with Abel Marsh who, having

donned his best suit of rich black broadcloth, satin vest, and high stock tie, was looking supremely uncomfortable in consequence. Hope Hamilton had gravitated to the quarter where she usually found refuge in this house, and was deep in earnest argument with Francis' mother, while he, in an opposite corner, with Laura Grahame, was drawing the attention of a certain grave-faced young man in his direction as often as her silvery peals of laughter rang out in response to some witty saying of his.

Phil Marsh seemed to be everywhere at once, putting all his mother's guests at their ease, while his father's eyes followed him approvingly. The afternoon passed in social interchange of conversation.

Supper was served at six precisely, and all came to the table with hearty appetites to partake of the good things prepared for them. There were no dividing lines between those of slightly different station, and Ephraim and 'Scilla sat at the table with the rest as they always did with the family. Only once did Ephraim distinguish himself. With flushed face he essayed to pass a large glass dish of quince preserve, holding it so high above his head with trembling hands, and unseeing eyes, that he tilted it to an alarming angle and, before he was cognizant of Hope's warningly uttered "Be careful, Ephraim," part of the contents had dripped over his immaculate shirt front.

After supper there were corn popping, cracking of nuts, sweet cider, apples, and some innocent party games, at which, as usual, poor Ephraim furnished most of the sport by his ludicrous mistakes. At ten someone suggested home and, with merry good nights, the party trooped out of the house.

The last two couples to stroll down the walk to the gate were John Sherburne and Laura Grahame and Francis Marsh with Hope Hamilton. Phil Marsh paused a moment, in the open doorway, then turned to where Ephraim and 'Scilla stood alone in the narrow hallway.

"It's a bad sign to watch them out of sight," he said, slowly, and there was a tinge of bitterness in his voice. "Good night, 'Scilla. Good night, Eph. Father and mother have gone to bed. Guess I'll go, too."

"All right," mumbled Ephraim. "Good night."

He turned to where 'Scilla had been standing but a moment before, in the door of the sitting-room, her coarse beauty softened and augmented by the mellow rays from the oil lamp, falling on her dress, her eyes, her hair. His heart was throbbing wildly with love for her, and, in his own untutored way, he meant to tell her so, now and here. But where she had been was yawning darkness. The light was out and she had vanished.

He stared about him in bewilderment. And from above him, at the head of the upper stairway, a mocking voice floated downward, drawlingly:

"Good night — Ephrum. Good night."

CHAPTER III

AWAY down in the back end of Solomon Penny's store the big soapstone stove glowed with fervent heat, generated by combustion of the long sticks of wood a crowd of loafing men were piling into its capacious interior at intervals, regardless of Solomon's feelings or his distaste for the task of sawing it. He liked better to loll behind his counter these frosty mornings of early winter, or, emerging from that vantage ground, to tilt himself back in a chair, his feet elevated to the top of the stove, and, pipe in mouth, to listen to the conversation that never lacked for impetus or spiciness, occasionally interjecting, in the hoarse, ear-splitting accents of his voice, some opinion, always at variance with the views agreed upon by the rest.

The little store stood just to the north of the schoolhouse, and was joined to the house where Mrs. Penny and her brood of children domesticated. Solomon kept everything in stock, from a paper of pins to a hogshead of molasses, and rejoiced in the trade of every inhabitant of Woodley Centre, with whom he "swapped" for butter, eggs, and vegetables, which he in turn disposed of in the neighboring city.

The conversation, as usual, this morning turned on the politics of the country, which at this early part of November, in '60, had taken on, to those who read and digested the various publications of all parties, a particularly apprehensive aspect.

In the village of Woodley Centre, as in some larger places, individual feeling ran high, and indi-

vidual opinions were volunteered without invitation or hindrance. On one side of the stove, in a capacious armchair, sat Nathan Drake, one of the town fathers, and a man to the expression of whose sentiments his townsmen generally deferred. John Dale, another neighbor and selectman, a horse trader of no mean reputation for sharpness and candor, leaned against a cider barrel flicking at imaginary flies on his boot top with a long horsewhip. Eli Abbot, a close-mouthed and tight-fisted farmer from the north district, was perched on the high back of a wooden chair, his long legs buckled nearly to his chin so that his feet could find resting place in its seat. He was discreetly silent. Imbibing but never imparting, he went through the world, knowing all his neighbors "like a book," as he tersely expressed it, but an uncut page to most of them.

Last and least, Solon Wiseman, who was slightly "wanting," if Woodleyites could be believed, and made a precarious living by doing small jobs for the farmers and their wives, was supporting himself by one elbow on the adjacent counter and listening with half-open mouth to the weighty arguments adduced by the wiseacres about the glowing stove.

Suddenly there was a clatter of footsteps on the doorstone outside, the door flew open unceremoniously, and Ephraim Binks precipitated himself upon the corner of the counter nearest the entrance.

"Mis' Marsh wants some soap," he jerked out, she's all out — an' she's washin'."

"In a hurry, Eph?" called out John Dale, cheerily, "better take life a bit easier. You know 'haste makes waste,' an' it seems to me," transfixing the newcomer with a shrewd gleam of one keen gray eye, "that you're always in a hurry. An' yet," teas-

ingly, "you never git nowhere, 'cause you tumble 'round so much."

"It's Mis' Marsh 'ts in a hurry. I ain't," ejaculated Ephraim, good-naturedly.

"Twasn't Mis' Marsh ez tumbled into the doorway," suggested Solomon Penny, as he rose, stretched himself, and proceeded slowly to insinuate his person through the little group of men and behind the counter where the boxes of soap were kept. He looked behind cans and barrels before he came upon the particular brand he knew, from experience, his customer required, talking all the while.

"How's all the folks, Ephrum? Francis gone back to college?"

"Ye-up," slowly, "went away yisterday. They're all well."

"'Xcept you," volunteered John Dale, and a ripple of laughter passed from mouth to mouth about the store.

"A college education's a grand good thing." Nathan Drake swung himself around in his chair and faced his audience, "it makes a gentleman out of a farmer," ruminatively.

"I'm thinkin'" the harsh voice of Solomon Penny rose above the noise of shuffling feet as Eli Abbot raised the lid of the stove to drop in another piece of wood, "that gentlemen ain't what we'll be needin' before long, to do the fightin'," he added, significantly, and then, turning to Ephraim with a huge bundle, "here's your soap, Eph."

But, his errand done, Ephraim seemed in no hurry to depart. He opened his eyes wide and fixed them on the next speaker, who happened to be Solon Wiseman, hitherto silent from sheer necessity.

"Then you think they'll fight," he squeaked in a thin, piping voice, looking fearfully around as if for some way of escape.

"Yes," Nathan Drake condescended a respectful assent to the questioner, "without a doubt. Things have gone too far now, for either party to withdraw. If you read the papers, as I do," somewhat pompously, "you'd see that what is practically a state of war exists now at Washington. All it needs is the spark, and the flame will burst forth and blaze fiercely," evidently quoting from some recently perused article.

"Do you think they'll want me to go?" Solon ducked his head as if already bullets were flying thick and fast about him.

But he was destined never to know what his townspeople thought of his chances for escape, for at that moment the door was pushed gently open and there entered a stranger. An abrupt silence fell upon the group. Ephraim Binks, with his bundle of soap, slouched down to the corner by the stove and remained standing there, in open-mouthed curiosity, till the stranger should have stated his errand.

"Good morning," he began, affably, addressing Solomon Penny, who stood expectantly behind the counter.

"'Mornin'," responded Mr. Penny.

The stranger was of medium height and slender build, with light hair and florid complexion, whose coloring was intensified by his long walk in the bracing wind. Under one arm he carried a good-sized book in a black cover. There were a collar and cuffs of curly black fur, considerably worn, on his overcoat, and, perched on his shining locks, a rather battered looking silk hat with an exaggerated bell crown. He stepped up to Mr. Penny confidentially.

"I am a music master," he said, "and have singing schools in all the nearby towns. Having heard," grandly, "that there were several good singers in your vicinity, I have ventured in here to inquire if there might be a chance for me to begin a class, in your schoolhouse, perhaps," suggestively.

Ephraim Binks was all interest now. Here was a chance to gain 'Scilla's good will anew, if she would only go to singing school with him, and he was hopeful.

"Wal, I don't know. Where did you say you come from?"

"Boston. Here is my card."

Solomon Penny picked it up gingerly between his grimy fingers.

"Professor," he read, slowly, "Professor — Robert — Henry — Hemilstross. A good deal of a name. So you're from Boston? How's everythin' up that way? Good deal of excitement sence 'lection?"

"Tre-mendous!" the newcomer affirmed. "Of course, the main population in that city are rank abolitionists and Republicans, and they favor the incoming administration. But for myself, I can say that my opinions are not all that way."

"Then you ain't in favor — if I may make bold to say so — of honest Abe Lincoln for president?"

"I don't say that; but I do say," and he looked boldly on the little group of men who had gathered near him, "that he is too radical a man in his sentiments, to suit the majority of the population in this country. You must remember Boston is not the whole country. Why, man, when you go to destroy an institution that had its origin before the time of King James, whose version of the Bible is your ac-

cepted authority in matters religious, an institution which Whitefield, the greatest evangelist in the world, made use of for the furtherance of his divine—divine, I say,” he struck the counter sharply with his fist, “plans, you have gone too far, I say, when you attempt to destroy that.”

The object of his call was forgotten. The big black book dropped unheeded to the floor. In his excitement he seemed not to see the other men standing there.

“You ain’t a northerner, air you?” inquired Eli Abbot, sarcastically.

“Me?—why, yes, I am. But because I was raised here, born and bred on the soil where they have persecuted people for their religious beliefs from time immemorial, and hung witches, I am not obliged to believe all they say and do, am I? I tell you, man,” and he brought down his fist again with tremendous vigor, “the whole country ain’t agoin’ to stand behind the opinions of a few bigoted Puritans.”

“An’ I tell you—” Solomon Penny’s raucous voice rang out as explosive as a clap of sudden thunder, “that there ain’t agoin’ to be no singin’ school taught this winter by no man of the name,” reading from the card deliberately, “of the name of Professor—Robert—Henry—Hemilstross.”

Ephraim Binks had been a silent listener to the controversy, though at some of the sentiments expressed his great, reddened hands had clenched themselves involuntarily and his face had glowed a deeper carnation. Now he acted.

He was controlled by some impulse he could neither withstand nor comprehend. The bundle of soap dropped to the floor with a loud bang. The string broke and cakes of the hard yellow variety

rolled in all directions. One of Ephraim's pudgy fists shot out and grasped the stranger firmly by the back of his shabby fur collar. The wide toe of Ephraim's heavy boot was elevated, some one obligingly opened the door, else they would have gone through bodily, and, propelled by the sturdy strength of the hardy youth behind him, Professor Hemilstross made two leaps to the doorway, and then tumbled unceremoniously down the steps, right into the arms of a tall, angular woman who was ascending them.

"Here! Who be you?" she called out, sharply, as, in a vain effort to regain his equilibrium, the professor caught her clinging skirt in a close grasp, "here — you — let go —" and she shook herself indignantly loose from the clenching fingers. Then she stalked into the store.

In one corner Ephraim Binks was bent almost double gathering up, awkwardly, the scattered cakes of soap, and endeavoring nervously to enclose them all again in the extremely limited piece of paper Solomon Penny had used for wrapping them.

"Where's Ephrum Binks?" she demanded, sharply, of the little group by the stove, "oh, there you be! Wal," sarcastically, "what do you mean by comin' here after soap to do the washin' with, an' me in such a hurry, an' stayin' all the forenoon, listenin' to somethin', I'll be bound, that wa'n't intended for your ears. An' what in the name of all creation air you atryin' to do now?"

"Yes'm," meekly, "I'm comin' jest as soon as I kin git this soap tied up."

"You, Solomon Penny," she turned to the storekeeper, "you git down thar an' help that awkward

critter tie up them bars o' soap. I sh'd thought you might of sent him home," reproachfully.

"Wal, you see, Mis' Marsh, we was all too busy to think o' that," the storekeeper replied, hoarsely. "P'raps you noticed that gentleman comin' down the steps as you come in. That, Mis' Marsh, was Professor Hemilstross," again consulting the card which lay on the counter, "a gentleman that ain't agoin' to keep no singin' school in Woodley Centre this winter, ef we know it. An' Eph, why, bless your soul, Aunt Sarah," as he stooped to gather up the soap, "Eph was so busy tryin' to uphold the Union that he clean forgot all about the soap."

He made a low obeisance and gave her the bulky parcel of soap. She turned to the doorway, calling back over her shoulder, "Ephraim Binks, be you acomin' home — today?"

And a meek voice replied, as its owner shuffled out of the doorway in her wake, "Yes'm. I'm comin' now — direckly."

CHAPTER IV

EPHRAIM BINKS, with 'Scilla's assistance, was building the fire in the big brick oven in the living room. It lacked but a day of Thanksgiving, and needed only the last baking, for which he was now preparing, to make all things ready for the feast. Having brushed the interior of the oven clean of last year's dust with an immense turkey's wing, he proceeded to light a fire, after which he piled in the great sticks of maple wood until no more could be crowded in, and closed the iron door tightly.

How the blaze roared and crackled up the wide flues of the chimney! He and 'Scilla stood side by side listening to the crisp snapping of the well seasoned wood, awaiting the exact moment when the oven should be ready for service. 'Scilla's face glowed with unwonted exercise and the sense of her nearness to Ephraim. They were alone. Sarah Marsh, in the wide pantry, was making ready the supplies for the oven and thinking of her favorite son, who would return tonight to be with them on the morrow.

"'Scilla."

Ephraim edged a little nearer the girl of his choice and tried to reach one of her plump red hands.

"Go 'way," and she moved over to the other side of the oven.

"'Scilla," entreatingly, "I want to tell ye something."

"I've heard all about it," she replied, scornfully.

"When?" surprisedly.

"Soon's it happened."

"Soon's what happened?"

He opened the door of the oven a little way. The sticks were still blazing furiously, but were not consumed.

"Why, the fight," and she regarded him stonily.

"What fight? Whose fight?" A deeper red flushed the cheek turned toward her, the flush of chagrin. "I ain't ben fightin', 'Scilla,—honest Injun."

"Oh, deny it now," with a supercilious toss of her head, "'s if I didn't know all about it! How you licked, or tried to lick, the feller that come into the store an' wanted to keep a singin' school at the Centre. He's comin' back, for all that, an' agoin' to keep one at the Corners, an'," boastfully, "I'm goin'."

"Who with?"

"Not with you," saucily.

"I'll bet you ain't."

Ephraim's jaw dropped angrily as, seizing the handle of the red-hot door, he pulled it open.

"I sh'd hope I wa'n't."

"Well, you ain't."

His face was scorching with the intense heat of the oven as he reached for the fire shovel and began to withdraw the glowing cinders, depositing them in the opening or closet beneath, to cool off.

"But," he continued, handling the long shovel gingerly, "that wa'n't what I was agoin' to tell ye."

"'Bout the fight?"

"'Bout the fight," tersely, "it was something else."

"Tell it, then."

"Not ef I know myself," sturdily, "you kin guess it now."

"Keep it to yourself, then, smarty," and she flounced out of the room.

"Guess I will," and he shut his mouth closely as if something had hurt him. It was not a coal from the red-hot oven that fell on his hand just then, but a great big salty tear of real vexation and disappointment. With all her saucy ways and cruel pranks, Ephraim Binks had believed that this girl had a soft spot in her heart somewhere for him, and that she would yet disclose it; but now he was sure he had been grievously deceived. After what had passed in Solomon Penny's store, after the vigorous demonstration he had given of his principles, that she could deliberately go to the Four Corners to the singing school of Professor Hemilstross, and with someone else, staggered him. It convinced him, too, that there was not a spark of affection in the girl's whole nature for him. It was a bitter blow, for he had meant, this morning, here and now, to offer her as honest a heart as ever beat under an uncouth exterior.

He sighed deeply. He would ask Phil, to whom he had always confided everything, who never laughed at his awkwardness or his blunders, what to do.

Carefully he scraped out the last remnants of ashes and brushed, with quick strokes of the turkey's wing, as far as he could reach inside. Then he turned away, with a heavy heart. He would never forget this Thanksgiving baking, no, never.

"Mis' Marsh," he called, "oven's ready."

"All right, Ephrum. I'm comin'."

Once a year the great oven, which had passed into intermittent desuetude with the advent of the huge cooking stove in the kitchen, was fired in the good

old way, so dear to the hearts of those who had relegated to its usefulness the larger portion of space in the centre of the house, and all the Thanksgiving supplies baked therein.

"'Scilla," called the good lady, loudly, "where be you. Why ain't you ahelpin' with these pies?"

'Scilla made her appearance at the sink-room door, with a very red face.

"I was washin' my hands," she said, shortly. Without a backward glance in her direction, Ephraim went out of the room, muttering something about "helpin' Phil with the stock," and she went to work industriously, transferring uncooked dainties from the shelves of the pantry to the oven's cavernous mouth. First, a great pot of beans was pushed far back into the shimmering heat, followed by an Indian pudding, already quaking in anticipation of its fiery ordeal. These were flanked by mince and pumpkin pies wherever they could be tucked in, and in the oven's centre reposed the stalwart bird which had been fattened on chestnuts and corn in a pen by himself for the last two months.

On the outside, nearest the door, loaves of brown and white bread reposed until they should be drawn forth on the morrow, crisp and flaky as to crust, and of the luscious moisture within, that would delight the gastronomic nerves of an epicure. The long hours in the slowly cooling oven would impart to the beans and the pudding that rich redness of color and elusive spiciness of taste that could be gained in no other way.

Steadily and thoughtfully, back and forth, 'Scilla trudged, bringing each dainty to the housewife, who stood by the oven door to receive them. As the last one disappeared behind the swinging black iron door, she paused with a long sigh.

"Mis' Marsh," she said, softly.

"What is it, 'Scilla?"

The good lady turned her glasses full on the girl's flushed face and noted there its signs of worry.

"Do you think — there'll be a war, ma'am?"

"Sakes alive! What put that notion into your head, child? Who's ben talkin' to you? No. I don't. I think all our folks is too sensible to fight over somethin' that ain't any o' their business. Fightin', 'Scilla, 's a good deal like housekeepin'. If everyone done all that belonged to 'em to do, an' let other folk's business alone, that'd even things, I imagine. There'll be a lot more o' fightin' done with talk than there ever will with guns. That's my opinion, anyway."

"There's a good deal o' talk," mused the girl, "goin' the rounds 'bout it, an' ef such a thing should happen, I s'pose all the men hereabouts would haf to go."

"I s'pose so, but there ain't agoin' to be any fight. You mustn't believe all you hear up to Solomon Penny's when I send you up there. It ain't no fit place to go, anyway. Men talk about wimmen tattlin'," incisively, "why, there ain't a place in this town where anyone'll git pulled to pieces as they will up there, an' there ain't anythin' but men there, either. It beats all natur."

"That's so," from the girl assentingly. "Do you s'pose thet Ephrum'd go ef there was to be a war, Mis' Marsh?"

"He might hev to," tersely.

And a deeper shadow settled in the girl's eyes, but a stubborn curve about her wide mouth told that there would be no surrender unless the other side capitulated first, and only time would furnish any

information on that subject, for Ephraim had been sorely tried — and a worm will turn.

That night Francis Marsh came home.

Even the few weeks he had been away from them had produced a change in him, and there seemed an intangible something, flimsy as a gossamer veil, that marked his growth beyond them and their simple ways, and yet it was there. Phil felt it, though the brotherly hand clasp was as cordial as of yore. The mother felt it and was glad, for no heights, though far beyond her, were too exalted for this loved and loving son to attain. Yet she, too, sensed some trifling difference in his manner from the full confidence he had accorded her before going away.

It had been arranged that Hope should be there to meet him on his arrival, and when the new chaise, drawn by the strong roan horse, drew up in front of the house she ran impulsively down the steps to be the first to shake his hand and bid him welcome. Phil Marsh stooped to pull the robe into the carriage as he replied to her cheerful greeting.

"You go right in, Frank," he said, "and I'll drive round to the barn and put Billy up. He will want his supper, I guess."

"All right, old fellow," and the younger man sprang lightly out to meet, face to face, the sweetheart of his boyhood days, her cheeks aglow, her eyes shining with the light of youthful health and happiness.

"It seems so good," she told him, holding his arm confidentially, as they passed up the long walk to the door, "to get you home once more. I'm here, too," opening her eyes widely, "on a visit. For today and tomorrow. Do you think you can endure my presence as long as that, Knight Errant?"

"I shall certainly make the attempt."

He smiled down into the carefree eyes just below the level of his own with a puzzled expression, just a fleeting shadow, evanescent as a sudden gust of chilling wind over an August landscape, and turned to his mother's outstretched hand.

"You careless child! You'll git your death of cold," and she pushed the girl lovingly past her into the narrow hallway, then turned and followed her son into the sitting-room. He paused before the monster air-tight stove, and held out his hands to its sides.

"How is father?" he asked; "and Ephraim, and 'Scilla. I see they are not here."

"Ephrum's milkin'," his mother made haste to reply.

"And 'Scilla's upstairs mooning," Hope supplemented. "You know she and Ephraim have had a falling out, a misunderstanding."

"No. Is that so?"

"Yes," solemnly, "but they won't tell us, either of them, what it is all about. Only, 'Scilla is going to the singing school over at the Corners, with someone else."

"Whom?" After all, these home affairs, simple as they were, touched him, and he was eager to know the petty happenings that had transpired in his absence.

"I do not know. She is as impenetrable as darkness itself. Suffice it to say, that Ephraim is correspondingly miserable."

Then Phil and the father joined them, and they sat down to the first good old-fashioned supper Francis Marsh had enjoyed since he went away. There was plenty of merriment to make the meal go well,

and the sparkling eyes and silvery voice of the girl who shared it with them seemed to diffuse good cheer to all within her influence.

Phil Marsh watched her furtively while he ate, but no one noticed the exact expression of his eyes, because he joined heartily in all the pleasantries that were bandied about.

After supper they gathered around the fire, watched its flames leap up, then die away, through the stove door, and talked of the old times and the new. Hope, in whose face a more earnest light had dawned, sat next her lover in a low chair, where soft gleams of firelight darted out and played among the smooth bands of her shining hair and on the lap of her merino dress, where her hands were idly folded.

"'Scilla thinks," Sarah Marsh looked away over their heads into the darkness of the kitchen, as she said this, "that there's goin' to be a war, an' Ephrum's got to go. It worries her."

Hope laughed softly.

"Then why," she asked, "doesn't she treat him better?"

"A good many people," Francis Marsh spoke gravely, "with more advantages than 'Scilla are quite of her opinion."

"They're talkin' it pretty strong," assented his father.

"Yes, up to Solomon Penny's," interjected the decisive voice of his mother, "ef there's anythin' they don't talk up there."

"It seems to me," Phil Marsh looked up from the little circle of light he had been contemplating on the floor, to remark, "from the tone of the papers, if we are to take them trustingly, that Francis is right. There is strong feeling on both sides, and it will be hard to settle it amicably."

"It never will be settled that way," Francis averred; "there is a good deal of uneasiness all around; the matter has been simmering since not long after the War of the Revolution and, sooner or later, the crisis must come."

They talked until far into the night, and though all were hopeful, a deep sense of foreboding oppressed them, for there were some matters that had now become, from mere abstract things of disinterested contemplation, that had appeared to be for the government and not individuals to deal with, affairs of moment to every home, each human heart, and each felt that it was for him alone to satisfy the commanding voice of his conscience, and that before very long. Already, dark clouds loomed dull and forbidding above the horizon, the first mutterings of distant thunder could be heard, and the lurid glare from a conflagration that should ignite at a word and illumine the whole world was dimly visible to the prophetic eye.

Under the influence of this feeling they separated for the night. Phil sprang up first and said good-night, then the bluff and hearty farmer who was the head of the house. Sarah Marsh busied herself with the fastenings of the outer doors while Francis said his good-nights to Hope in the doorway to the hall. The subdued radiance of the single oil lamp fell on her dress, her shining eyes, and her hair. After she had gone lightly up the stairway, and he had closed the door behind her, he turned back and stood for a moment, with his mother, near the grateful heat of the stove.

The light fell also along the rugged lines of her countenance and down the straight folds of the narrow skirt she wore, even to the tip of her coarse

leather shoe; but the impartial beam brought out, with unerring exactness, the honesty and truth and strength that lay behind those plain features, and to the eyes of her son they were patent.

"Francis."

She did not turn to him with a caress — she was too truly a daughter of her native soil for that — but there was a wealth of tenderness in the even tones of her voice.

"Francis, you've come home different, somehow, from what you was when you went away. Ain't you agoin' to tell me all about it, son. Is it this trouble, about war, I mean," anxiously.

"That does trouble me, too, mother," and he held the toil-hardened hand for a moment in his softer one, "but it is not that. But," gravely, "I am not going to spoil our Thanksgiving, which I fancy I can smell through the door of the oven, with my petty affairs. It isn't so very dreadful after all, but there has come a change to me; and tomorrow, after the happy day is all over, I will tell you what it is. Good-night."

He turned and went softly through the door, and for a long time she stood there silent, as he had left her, her thoughts still following him.

CHAPTER V

A FILMY grayness sifted through the impenetrable thickness of the long night and gave ghostly outlines to the homes where half of the world lay sleeping. The bright stars that had watched through the silence, like myriads of kindly eyes, paled before the growing grayness of the coming morn and withdrew themselves behind a friendly cloud. Gradually objects separated themselves from the oblivion in which they had been swathed, and stood dimly revealed against a dull background. A cold November wind swept low on the ground, gathering up the few remaining leaves of summer's growth, weaving fantastic wreaths of them, and then swirling them away in riotous confusion to a wintry grave behind some sturdy tree or stone wall.

There was a breath like snow in the early morning air, that indefinable chill that is so much colder than the sparkling iciness of midwinter. Away off, beyond the dark line of pine trees that fringed the western horizon, a fox barked. Nearer home, the long, baying call of a hound echoed weirdly in the otherwise unbroken stillness.

One by one all forms of life awoke. Fowl stirred uneasily in their nests, rustled their wings, and then settled down to rest again. All was silent around the wide farmyard. The square piles of wood, low-browed farm buildings, and the house loomed up against the peculiar light now advancing against the forces of night, like the battlements of some feudal

city, dark and forbidding, and of mysterious location.

Suddenly, away down, close to the farthest edge of the eastern skies, a tiny line of light, a rift in the hopeless darkness, made its appearance. It was the herald of the king of day.

The farmhouse door opened into the gloom and Ephraim Binks, lantern in hand, stumbled over the low set doorstone and across the yard to the barn. Unfastening the heavy padlock, he pushed the wide doors apart and entered. For a few moments muffled sounds proceeded therefrom, the gentle swish of great handfuls of hay being pushed down to the hungry cattle beneath, and then the gurgling sound of water, as he turned the handle of the great chain pump in the barnyard.

Presently the interstice in the doors was filled with the form of Phil Marsh, and his shadow fell athwart the little gleam of the lantern.

"You here, Eph?" he called, cheerily.

"Ye-up. Just come," a deep voice drawled. "Cold, ain't it?" as more hay came tumbling down from regions above.

"Seems a little like snow," assented the other man, who was busy with pitchfork; and "Ye-up," again and, missing his footing, Ephraim came tumbling down from the hayloft.

"You'd better look out, Eph," and Phil Marsh laughed heartily at the grotesque figure at his feet, "some day you'll break your bones in one of your falls."

"Gosh darn it all," as he picked himself up, ruefully, "I guess I know it," brushing vigorously at the bits of hay that had lodged in his hair, "an' I don't care much ef I do, neither."

"Why, what's the matter, Eph, that you're so ready to die? You aren't sick, are you?"

"No. Wisht I was. I'm sick o' some things, though — mighty sick of 'em."

He leaned up against one of the stalls, chewing a straw reflectively.

"You mean 'Scilla, I suppose, by that?"

There was a twinkle in Phil Marsh's eye as he spoke, but his voice was grave and interested.

"Yes, darn it, I am. That gal's fooled me all she will, I guess, unless I'm a bigger tarnation fool than I think I am. You remember 'bout the fight me an' the singing master had, Phil, up to Sol Penny's store?"

"Yes."

"Wal, she heard of it, an' instid o' thankin' me for gittin' rid o' the ornery cuss, she's up an' goin' to his singin' school to the Corners, an' with him."

Ephraim delivered this broadside with telling effect.

"You don't say," thoughtfully.

"Yes, Phil, an' I want you to tell me what I'd better do. You know, yourself, there ain't no fur-trimmed feller from Bosting awantin' anythin' of a girl like 'Scilla — not but what she's good enough, but she ain't his kind an' you know it. She's done it to spite me an' because she hates me," desperately, "an' he's done it to make a fool o' her an' because I licked him — an' he knows I like 'Scilla. What would you do, Phil, if you was me?"

A kind of a grim smile settled over Phil Marsh's face as he replied, "I'd lick him again, Eph, if I were you."

"By gosh, I bleeve I will!" muttered Ephraim, as he grasped the brimming milk pails they had been

filling as they talked, and walked thoughtfully toward the house by Phil's side. He had the most profound respect for this young man who helped him with his tasks and was always ready to hear the stories of his troubles and disappointments. There was a warm place in the heart of Phil Marsh for all who had not received the advantages he had, either naturally or educationally, and he never derided their lack of grace or laughed at the many mistakes they made. To him the simple love story of Eph and 'Scilla was as sacred, as deserving of the best thought of his intellect and his kindest judgment as his own, silently smothered for the sake of those who were dearer than life itself to him. Having suffered himself, he could sympathize with the sorrows of the simplest of God's creatures.

The whole of the household were astir when they came in and "washed up" at the kitchen sink, before eating the breakfast, which was smoking hot, for the tightly closed brick oven had been opened and its dainties drawn forth. The appetizing odor of baked beans and fresh brown bread pervaded the atmosphere, supplemented by a more delicate flavor that promised even better things for the feast later in the day.

But to the healthy, hearty people, pure of blood and mind, who sat down to this breakfast table, this was a banquet fit for the gods themselves, delectable and soul-satisfying.

The conversation turned, as it had done the night before, naturally to the subjects that were distressing the wisest heads and the greatest hearts in the country; and the deep waves of thought, expressed or unexpressed, that welled up from these simple homes all over the land, and surged and beat against the bul-

warks of the nation's capital, finally carried the great ship of state safe to harbor, storms outridden and anchor dropped, where, please God, it shall never be raised again, in the hearts of a united people.

Each had his or her opinion, and all voiced the sentiments nearest their hearts. There was some difference, even in this united family; but all agreed in the loyal patriotism that had been born into them from a long line of Puritan ancestry, who had braved the wintry seas to carry, to a new land, freedom and its institutions.

The early hours of the day passed briskly away.

Hope Hamilton, in a neat merino gown of magenta, symbolic of the blood of a famous battlefield, though this thought probably was not present with her when she had admired and purchased the beautiful though sanguinary shade, and a long gingham apron which covered her nearly from head to feet, wiped the breakfast dishes for 'Scilla, who preserved a charmed silence whenever Ephraim ventured into her vicinity, but chattered volubly enough when he had returned to his duties in the barn.

Francis was popping corn on the kitchen stove, eating almost as fast as he popped, and pausing now and then to offer the great pan of dainty white buttered flakes to the other occupants of the room, or watching gravely the lithe figure of the girl to whom he had plighted his vows, as she flitted busily back and forth, to reply to something his mother had said. That he was not in all respects his usual gay self, and that in some way the realization of his most cherished ambitions had proved disappointing, was apparent.

"I asked John Sherburne an' Laura to dinner."

Sarah Marsh, tall, spare, and angular, paused in her steady march between pantry and kitchen to say this.

"Why always John and Laura, mother? I believe you are a bit of a matchmaker." Francis held the popper motionless long enough to make this remark, then moved it vigorously back and forth across the glowing stove.

"No, I ain't. But he always seemed so friendly to you an' Phil, an' Laura, she's Hope's friend — an' I thought it would do him good," she finished, stoutly.

"I am sure it will." Hope laughed merrily. "You did just right. He is the most preternaturally solemn, old young man I ever saw. I wish he could be made to smile."

"Laura can effect the change if anyone can."

Francis nodded decisively as he snapped up the cover of the popper and emptied its crowded crispness into the pan.

"Perhaps," Hope's eyes twinkled, "he'd laugh at some of Ephraim's mistakes if he dared."

Scilla tossed her head and flushed.

"It's outrageous," Mrs. Marsh stood stiffly against the kitchen door with arms akimbo, "the way he goes gloomin' around. I don't think it's right for young folks to feel so. I'm a good many years older'n he is an' I ain't old enough yit so's I don't like to laugh an' I don't know's I ever shall be. I s'pose, though," with a sigh, "he thinks that's long's he's intendin' to be a minister, he mustn't smile," with emphasis, "'s if the Gospel was anythin' to be sad or cry about. If he bleeves it, I sh'd think 'twould of made him happy."

"It is his way, mother," gently from her son, "it is a mistaken way, I'll admit. He is too young to 'gloom' as you say, and we must try to make him laugh."

"Oh, Ephraim will surely do something," Hope interposed, "he always does. I laugh all the time when he is around."

"You're naturally of a sunny natur', one that don't see no harm in a good laugh. An' Ephrum—he don't mind a bit when anyone laughs at him. Ephrum's an awful good natured boy, ef he is a little awkward now an' then."

"He'll outgrow that," said Francis, kindly, "we can't judge a man's qualities by a little ungracefulness of person. We have a president who is an awkward man personally, but whose graces of mind and heart have caused everyone to forget his mere outward appearance."

'Scilla tossed her head pertly and was silent, with reddening cheeks. All this kindly commendation of Ephraim, spoken partly with the intent that she should assimilate it, irritated her, whose eyes had been dazzled with the false lustre of tinsel and blinded to the diamond in the rough.

Toward noon, John Sherburne, solemn-visaged as a young owl, arrived. There was something in the sterling integrity and absolute lack of deceit in this young man that endeared him to the hearts of all his friends, in spite of the habitual air of reserve that fitted him like a clinging garment. They knew they could trust their all with him if need be, and that in any grave crisis he would not fail them. But there is, in the lives of the young, a wellspring of merriment which is constantly bubbling over, an exuberance of spirit which belongs to youth, like its school days and the sunny fields and flowers.

The young girl who followed him into the Marsh home, after the lapse of half an hour, had an appreciative sense of the absolutely ridiculous as well as the merely mirthful, and her ready laugh rippled over on these occasions, like the purling streamlet which overflows its banks. She was the very antithesis of John Sherburne in every way, and so the grave-faced young man had never felt himself drawn to her or discovered the existence of a need in any respect of her companionship. He stood, as it were, afar off, and beheld these young people silently in their revels, but did not join them. The older people all liked him. To their soberer minds he seemed more of an associate, and their maturer judgment credited him with attributes which were undiscoverable by his contemporaries.

To Ephraim Binks, whose educational advantages had been of the most circumscribed variety, the young schoolmaster seemed the encyclopædia of knowledge, an epitome of things desirable to learn. Therefore, it was no wonder that in his eagerness to hear and understand what John Sherburne was saying concerning things political, to the elder Marsh, he did not notice the curled edge of a nicely braided rug and, tripping, was forced to seat himself rather abruptly in the nearest chair, with such vehemence as to disturb seriously the equilibrium of a pitcher of cider and a plate of apples he was carrying in either hand, jarring a good quantity of the liquid over the front of his clothes, where it trickled in a little stream down to the very toe of his greased boot, and sending half of the apples rolling under the table.

"Wal, I never," Mrs. Marsh looked up at him over the iron bows of her spectacles, "can't you stand up, Ephrum? Why don't you look where you're goin'?"

"I — I didn't see the rug," he stammered.

'Scilla, who was standing just outside the pantry door, curled her lip scornfully, while Laura Grahame and Hope burst into uncontrollable peals of laughter at the shamefaced attitude he had assumed, as well as the catastrophe.

"Don't laugh at him, girls," cautioned Mother Marsh, while John Sherburne elevated his eyebrows the merest trifle, in surprise at Miss Grahame's hilarity, observing which, she disregarded the warning voice of the elder woman and went off into another ripple of laughter.

"But he — he looked so comical, Mrs. Marsh, I can't help it, really," she gasped. "He just plumped down on to that chair and then — the apples flew."

"And the cider," supplemented Hope.

Abel Marsh burst into a hoarse laugh, deep and hearty. The ludicrous sense of the situation had just struck him, having been pointed out, and he did it full justice.

"Let the gals laugh, mother," he chuckled, "it'll do 'em good, an' it won't hurt Eph. Make him more careful, p'raps. You don't care, do ye, Eph," and he beamed on the red-faced youth with hearty good-nature.

"No," said Ephraim, drawlingly, "with a side glance in 'Scilla's direction, "'tain't bein' luffed at that hurts me."

After that the Thanksgiving feast was served. John Sherburne said grace, reminding each one present that there was occasion for deep gratitude, but seeming not to find any opportunity of expressing his own appreciation of the good things that had fallen to his lot. Under the influence of the groaning board

and its burden of appetizing viands, he warmed up somewhat, and a thread of geniality seemed to weave itself in and out of his conversation.

Laura Grahame could not forget his stern look of disapproval leveled at her from those calm gray eyes, so, in retaliation, she made several attempts, none of which were successful, to draw upon herself another well-merited reproof. His armor seemed to be steel clad and invulnerable, for nowhere could she discover its weakest point. She could neither fascinate, tantalize, nor anger this grave-featured boy, whose mind seemed occupied with weightier things than an appreciation of her witticisms or relish of her merriment. Once or twice he appeared to be studying the winsome face beneath the shining masses of smoothly combed hair of golden hue, the spotless little collar fastened with an engraved brooch, and the smoothly folded bodice of dark green cashmere that rose and fell with her soft breathing; but he studied her as one would a picture or a precious stone, admiringly, but without the least desire of possession.

Hope wore a jaunty little jacket of yellow thibet braided elaborately with black, over an under blouse of white, the whole surmounting a prettily made and voluminous skirt of black taffeta. She was charmingly pretty, fresh and bright looking, and there were eyes that covered every detail of her becoming attire longingly as well as approvingly.

Dinner over, John Sherburne did not linger long. With regretful excuses he deplored the necessity of cutting short their hospitality, pleading another and pressing engagement which it was imperative for him to fill.

"He is always that way," complained Hope, as they stood by the window watching the tall figure,

a solemn silhouette against the graying skies, ascend the hill, "he might be such good company if he only would. I am sure he has gone somewhere he did not want to."

"He has." Francis looked up to reply to her complaint. "Not many know John Sherburne as he really is. Outwardly cold and uninteresting, his heart is very loving and kind. He is going now to sit with one of his pupils, a child who will have no Thanksgiving but what he brings him. After that he will work for some hours helping a young lad at the Corners, who is struggling through his preparation for college and doing half the work on the farm beside. He studies evenings, and John acts as his tutor."

"The very good are invariably uninteresting," said Laura Grahame, slowly.

"There must be some birds of sober plumage," interpolated Phil, "to give life the variety it would otherwise lack. Not all of us can wear brilliant feathers, like Hope and you," touching lightly the bright gown she wore.

"Phil," she said, turning to him impulsively, "you are both good and bright."

He laughed and shook his head.

"A dun bird," he averred, "for one of my years. Too much like our friend the schoolmaster, I am afraid, to be either pleasing to look at or entertaining."

They talked merrily until long past lamplight and then Laura declared she must return home. Laughingly they attempted to persuade her to stay, but she waved them all aside.

"My father and mother," she said, "have spent this day alone. Their one bird of plumage," with a

light glance at Phil, "spread its wings and flew to a neighboring nest; and now she must return, to cheer them with her songs and the flutter of her showy feathers, in the evening, when they are lonely."

Her voice thrilled with some deeper meaning as she concluded this speech, and Hope placed her arm lovingly about her shoulders.

"You are not all bright plumage, dear," she said, softly, "there is a heart too, beneath, could they but find it," and then they tripped off together to get her outer wraps. Phil undertook to carry her home, and while he went to harness up "old Roan" she laughingly informed his family that she should keep him for the evening.

"All right," Abel Marsh pinched the girl's cheek slyly, "he couldn't be in better hands. Mother and me are willing."

So the evening passed. Abel Marsh went out to the barn to assist Ephraim with the last chores of the day and his wife betook herself to the kitchen, where she washed the dishes and made ready for another day, having given 'Scilla the rest of the day and evening to herself.

In the low-walled parlor, by the light of the tall brass lamp on the table, Francis Marsh and Hope Hamilton talked in low tones, while evening shadows fell and night wrapped the impenetrable mantle of darkness over the tired world.

By-and-by the father came in, stamping his feet loudly in the kitchen and calling out noisily, "it's ben snowing a little." Then he walked heavily up the stairs to his bedroom, followed presently by Ephraim's stumbling steps. Soon Hope stood in the narrow hallway, starry-eyed and youthful, and, having bidden him good-night, passed softly up the stairway out of his sight.

Through the open door of the sitting-room, in the dim light, he could discern the form of his mother sitting erect, her features thrown into strong relief by the light of the lamp on the table near her. His eyes turned from the contemplation of that picture, and followed the wavering shadows that trailed after the girl's retreating figure.

"For the last time," he whispered softly, with the darkness of a great pain in his eyes, "the very last time. Dear, good, faithful Hope."

Then he turned away, closed the door softly, and stood in the presence of his mother.

"Mother!" he just breathed.

"Yes," she answered him and a puzzled look rose in her light eyes.

"I am going to tell you all now — what has burdened me since I came home. Oh, you are all so good to me here, have done and are doing so much for me. How shall I say it?"

He moved a chair near her side and, sitting down in it, raised one toil-hardened hand from her lap to his lips and kissed it reverently.

"Mother," he began again, abruptly, "do you know what love is?"

She hesitated a moment, thought deeply and then answered quickly, "Yes, Francis, I bleeve I do. It's like charity — suffereth long and is kind."

"Yes, where one truly loves, one can do that — for the loved object. Mother, I have made a mistake. I have never loved Hope as I should, as I do — someone else."

For a moment she was silent. The great clock, just outside the door, in the hall, ticked the minutes away patiently, and he watched her face for the signs of her disapproval.

Presently she said in a low voice, "I am so sorry, Francis. I love Hope dearly as a daughter, an' — an' I wanted —"

"I know, mother, and I love her, too, as a dear — a very dear sister. Until someone else came into my life I could have loved her as you wished — could have married her. I can marry her yet, if you think I ought."

She did not reply to this, but she asked him, "who is she?"

"The daughter of Professor Gardiner — Margaret Gardiner. It was a case, with me, of love at first sight," with a mirthless smile, "though I refused to believe it then, knowing what it would mean to Hope, what it would mean to you, and what it would cost me. But love is stronger than my will, stronger than life or death, or any other thing, stronger than the awful cowardice that came to me and filled my mind when I knew I must tell you this, knew Hope must know it. Mother, for her own good, she must know it."

"Have you told her?" slowly.

"No. I am too cowardly. In the presence of her fearless eyes, her happy heart, and her unsuspecting love I am powerless to tell her how I have deceived her. Mother, this love has made me very unhappy, but I cannot conquer it."

He bowed his head on his hand and remained silent.

"Do you want me to tell her, Francis?" There was a little quaver in the voice that asked the question.

"No, it would not be right."

"I think it would be better," quietly, "she might take it better, comin' through me. You know Hope thinks an awful lot o' me, Francis."

"I know she does, mother," in muffled tones. "Do you think I am wrong, that I should forget her — Margaret — and marry Hope in spite of all?"

"No," solemnly, "you mustn't do that. You know best. It is better for one to suffer than for three. Poor, poor, pretty Hope."

Silence drooped again over the room until a deep sigh fell from the lips of his mother.

"Let's see, when do you go back, Francis?"

"Next week," dully.

"After you go back, Francis, I'm comin' there, to the school, to see you — an' I want to see her, too. After that, I'll tell Hope myself. I think it'll be best for me to."

"If you knew, mother," there was real agony in the voice that made reply, "if you only knew how this hurts me — how I dread to be so — mean — so dishonorable — so little of a man. I'll tell her myself," starting up, "or no — she need never know. But then, see how Margaret must suffer — for she loves me, too, little as I deserve it," in a low voice.

"You let me be," Sarah Marsh rose from her chair and laid one hand on the bowed head, "I'll fix it all right. We've all got to suffer in this world, Francis, some of us for what we do ourselves an' some of us for what other people do to us. I've hed my part of the sufferin', Francis, an' bore it, too, without much talkin', an' Hope, when her time comes — an' it seems es though it hed got here — must bear hers. It's a woman's lot, women's more'n men's I'm thinkin', to bear — an' Francis, I'll make it as easy as I can, for her, after I've seen the other one. Now you jest go right up to bed an' leave it to your mother. An'," as an afterthought, "to God. I guess we kin take care of you, an' Hope too. Trust me, Francis, an' Him."

"Yes, mother," wearily, "good-night."

CHAPTER VI

“**Y**OU goin’ to the singin’ school tonight, ‘Scilla?”

“I be if I want to.”

“It’s snowin’.”

“I ain’t afraid o’ snow.”

Ephraim had just come in from the barn with two foaming pails of milk, and his coat was powdered with fine, feathery flakes. ‘Scilla had turned away from the sink where she was washing dishes, to answer him curtly, but now she resumed her work with a great rattle and clatter, while Ephraim proceeded on his way to the pantry with the milk. All his overtures toward peacemaking had been met with the same crisp pertness on the girl’s part, and he was disheartened.

He went up to his room over the ell, and made such changes in his apparel as suggested themselves to him. He could hear ‘Scilla singing, through the partition as she stepped around briskly, getting ready for the evening. Singing! A contemptuous smile curled his lip. Who had discovered her voice, who flattered her until she really thought it an oversight not to cultivate it? There was a good deal of hard-headed common sense in Ephraim’s makeup, some sorts of knowledge born in him, that were not to be acquired at school, and he saw through these attempts of Professor Hemilstross to make himself agreeable to an ignorant girl with nothing to recommend her to his attention save the lusty beauty that had fired his own admiration. He knew the evanescent char-

acter of the notice such girls received from the class of men to which the professor belonged, and he was determined, if possible, to save her from the resulting heartache of the inevitable awakening.

He stole cautiously down the stairs and out of the house. A few words of whispered consultation with Phil, a hurriedly conceded assent, and he was soon harnessing old Roan to the family sleigh. It was snowing "great guns," as Ephraim had expressed it to Phil, and the atmosphere surrounding the farm was fast graying with the filmy flakes, through which the light from its windows glowed fitfully.

Presently, from his vantage ground behind the barn window, Ephraim saw the professor drive up to the gateway in a buggy, and 'Scilla, coming at that moment from the house, they drove away through the blinding storm. Ephraim's notions of conventionality were not refined enough to enable him to discern any lack of propriety in the attentions of the professor; but his honest heart burned with fierce indignation and jealousy as he, too, started on his long, cold drive to the Four Corners.

There was but little wind stirring as yet, and the snow was wet and sticky, mingled with a sharp, sleety downfall that cut the face cruelly. The air was not cold, but so full of the white particles that they weighted his eyelids down when he attempted to peer ahead into the dimness of the coming night. He could not distinguish the couple who rode ahead of him in the darkness, but occasionally, far in the distance, he caught the sound of the buggy wheels crunching the soft snow, and then he laughed, grimly, noiselessly.

The Four Corners was a drive of five miles from Woodley Centre, and by the time 'Scilla and the pro-

fessor had taken off their steaming wraps by the big box stove, quite a crowd had collected in the little schoolhouse. With flushing cheeks, 'Scilla walked down the aisle and took her seat, while Professor Hemilstross mounted the platform and began to make characters on the blackboard behind the desk. Just as he waved the long pointer he used to beat time with, and said sharply, as befitted his dignity, "all sing! one, two, three, four," accompanying the words with a slight swaying motion of his slender body, there was a sound of shuffling in the entry outside, and presently the door opened and Ephraim Binks strode slowly into the room, shaking the alabaster flakes from his shaggy coat like a great dog.

All eyes turned from the professor to him.

Nearly everyone in the room had heard of the encounter in Solomon Penny's store, for news disseminates itself with wonderful rapidity in country sections, and most of those present knew that the professor had appropriated unto himself, in revenge, the companionship of the girl whose shining black eyes had bewildered Ephraim. Therefore a little buzz of interest became apparent upon his entrance.

Professor Hemilstross, lithe, slender, and dapper, with well-oiled, curly, light locks, and a tiny moustache whose ends were stiffly waxed upward, went on with the singing lesson, not noticing the interruption.

For a few moments Ephraim stood by the stove drying the little globules of water to which the snow crystals had turned, then he left the radius of the grateful heat and marched slowly across the floor. The professor glared at him. He stumbled over a pair of protruding feet under one of the front desks and, lurching heavily against the singer nearest him,

sent his book flying across the floor. 'Scilla's lips curled scornfully. A few girls in a little group by the door tittered audibly as, with gradually deepening color, Ephraim groped about the floor for the singing book.

Presently he found it and restored it to its former possessor. The professor stopped short in the middle of a bar of music.

"When this confusion is quieted, we will resume this exercise."

Ephraim dropped into a front seat directly under the eye of the singing master, and sat there, silently staring about him. He made no attempt to sing. He had not come for that, and steadily refused all offered books. He could hear 'Scilla's discordant voice every now and then, rising above the mass of the other singers, and somehow its notes jarred him.

He wished she would keep still. He always did, when there was music, because he liked the harmony of trained voices so much better than the sound of his own.

Those who had expected trouble when the two men met were doomed to disappointment, for the meeting passed off without further friction. The professor glowered at Ephraim, triumphant, superior, but Ephraim sat patiently, watching and biding his time. His was the defeat now, his the humiliation, but the animal fidelity in his nature called for this sacrifice of pride and he made it cheerfully, obeying an inherent instinct he could not comprehend.

Presently the lesson was over and, without a glance in his direction, 'Scilla rose from her seat radiant in her crimson cashmere, which somehow seemed a foil for the sparkling brightness of her eyes, and went to the entry to put on her wraps. Ephraim

also vacated his seat and followed her, losing the cynical smile on the face of Professor Hemilstroß as he did so. In the entry he halted at the girl's side, humbly, with dogged faithfulness.

"'Scilla," he asked her, "it's snowin' powerful bad an' I've got the sleigh and old Roan; 'sides, I kin take you right home an' save him the trouble o' comin' that way."

She turned to him with flashing eyes.

"No, I ain't agoin' home with you, Ephrum Binks, an' you needn't ask me to. I'll go as I come, an' no thanks to you."

Her spirited reply, coupled with the dejection of Ephraim's attitude, raised a laugh among the young people standing around, in the confusion of which, and smarting under the snub he had received, he beat a hasty retreat. But not until the slender black horse and the buggy containing the professor and 'Scilla had started off down the straggling highway did Ephraim turn old Roan's head in the direction of home.

All the rest of those who had attended tonight lived at the Four Corners, so the two lonely equipages had the road to themselves. The wind had changed and was snarling viciously, whirling and swirling the tiny, stinging crystals of ice round and round in bewildering circles. The earth was white with the fallen flakes, already drifting into the roadways and against fences. The sky, a dirty, shifting gray, and the air sifted full of pinhead dots of blinding, blowing snow. It was growing colder.

Ephraim huddled up under the buffalo robe, let the big horse take his own way, satisfying himself of its correctness by the little twinkling lights that shone through the murky air on either side of the road.

The reverberating sleighbells, strung along the horse's haunches, kept time to the bitterness of his thoughts. He had been repulsed, rejected, and yet, here he was, all patient watchfulness and solicitude for her, lest she come to harm. She was not worth it. Who, beloved, is ever worthy of the great love bestowed?

The drifts were growing deeper, houses by the side of the road less frequent, as still they plodded along. The snowflakes fell faster and faster, with a soft, whispering sound, perfectly audible to the ears strained to catch the lightest murmur, and were snatched up by the snarling winds, torn and rent cruelly, and then forced down, down, into the deep drifts that were steadily piling up ahead of the strong-limbed horse.

One, two of these drifts he passed safely, noting as he went through the marks made by the team ahead of him. At the third, he came to a sudden standstill. He was half way home, and here, inextricably stuck in the monster drift of deepness, were the professor and 'Scilla in their light buggy.

At the sound of Ephraim's sleighbells, they looked out.

He drew up beside them.

"What's the matter?" he called out, "can't you git no further?"

The professor was out of the buggy, holding the horse by the bridle, and he deigned no reply to the well meant question.

"You can't git through that drift," shouted Ephraim again, "not with that hoss an' a two-wheeled shay. Nothin' 'xcept a sleigh'll git through there. And" he chuckled, "it'll take a shovel to help a sleigh along, I'm thinkin'."

"Keep your thoughts to yourself," the professor growled at him, "and go on. We don't want any of your assistance."

"You ain't agoin' to git it, then," said Ephraim, cheerfully, "nor I ain't agoin' on, through all these ere drifts, with a shovel. It'll be mighty easy for you to foller in the track I've made, an' I ain't agoin' to do no sech foolish thing. You kin stay here all night, for all o' me, an' I'll stay, too. I guess ole Roan kin keep his end up."

Ephraim settled back comfortably in the sleigh, arranging the buffalo about him, and was quiet. Presently he heard the professor climb back into the chaise and, slapping the reins over the horse's back, cry "g'lang! Get up!" But the poor beast could not move. The heavy snow was as impenetrable a barrier as if it had been solid masonry. Then in muffled tones came from the girl, "I'm so cold. I shall freeze. Go an' ask him what we sh'll do."

Ephraim's heart throbbed loudly in triumph as the professor came through the snow to the side of the sleigh. In the impenetrable darkness their countenances were hid, but the voice that penetrated the swishing silence betrayed the anxiety of the singing master's mind.

"You know these roads better than I do," he was saying, "what'll you take to pilot me through?"

"Nothin'." Ephraim settled back stolidly. "I ain't no pilot."

The professor muttered something not very complimentary under his breath.

"Name your terms, then," he shouted angrily, against the wind. "I must get out of this before morning. I'm almost frozen stiff now."

"What's that?" bawled Ephraim. "I can't hear you, the wind blows so."

"Name your terms, I said." Professor Hemilstross turned his face away from the wind. "Get me out of here, at any cost."

"You 'gree?" Ephraim put the question plumply, to be met with a hasty "Yes, yes, man. It's too cold to dicker."

"Wal then," deliberately, raising his voice so that it might easily have been heard a mile away—at any rate it drowned the barking voices of the storm wolves for an instant—"wal, look here. You let the gal git into this sleigh an' I'll carry her safe home, an' you kin foller us," contemptuously.

The professor passed once more to the buggy, already coated thickly with the heavy snowfall, so that it loomed like a ghostly equipage through the darkness. There was a hurried consultation, and presently 'Scilla came breathlessly through the snow and climbed into the sleigh by Ephraim's side. He handed her the reins and took a shovel from under the seat. Then he tucked the buffalo robe well around her and jumped out of the sleigh.

"You kin foller us," he shouted to the professor. But that dignitary did not reply.

The sturdy young giant lent his whole strength to the task in hand, and presently returned to the sleigh, shovel in hand, and took the reins from the girl's hand. During all the rest of the long ride, in inky darkness and intense cold, where instinct traced the way better far than reason or sense, and when he fought his way, breathing hard, through the mountain-like drifts, the girl uttered no word. And silently behind them, guided by the clanging sleigh-bells, followed a ghostly turnout, occupied by a single chagrined individual who had no word to say to the rival who had, perhaps, this night saved his life

as well as that of the foolish girl who had come with him.

When finally, after three hours battling with the great power of the snowstorm, Ephraim drove into the yard of the Marsh home, the professor was not with them. He had stopped farther up the road, at Solomon Penny's, for accommodation.

Silently Ephraim lifted the girl out of the sleigh and set her on her benumbed feet. Silently he piloted her through the unbroken snow in the dooryard and stood with her on the doorstone. There she turned to him with flashing eyes.

"You done it, didn't you, Ephrum Binks, made me ridicerlous — an' him, too. I hate you — so!"

Then like a fury she dashed out of the snapping, snarling wind, and flung the door to right in his face.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Sarah Marsh enumerated her blessings, there was one that always failed her. That there had been only sons born to her had grieved her sorely in the early days of her married life, for, like all women, she desired to live over again her own youth in that of her daughters. Failing of that pleasure, she had, unconsciously perhaps, allowed her affections to twine themselves closely about the personality of her younger son, until in him her life almost had, if not its being, at least its continuity.

The remainder of her family she loved with an unfaltering devotion, detracting nothing that was their due from their physical or mental wellbeing; but him she worshiped, with the humble idolatry she would have bestowed on a daughter had so great a blessing been ordained to her lot. Outwardly there was very little difference in her treatment of her two sons; but if she had never penetrated beneath the surface of Phil Marsh's placid exterior, it was because she had never offered to him the spiritual friendship, the soul to soul familiarity enjoyed by her other offspring.

And one needed to know her in this way to know her at her best, since the practical side of her nature was ever uppermost to the superficial onlooker.

The next best thing to having a daughter of her own would be to assist in the selection of Francis' wife; and this she had done, being glad when he had chosen, from all the girls in the neighborhood, the

one she would have preferred that her own daughter should resemble. Between Hope Hamilton and the elder woman a real affection existed, an affection that, much as it might depend on the strength of the attachment between the young lovers, was still independent of it in a way.

Now fate, blind and unrelenting, had interposed, scattering her well-laid plans to the four winds and decreeing that all that had been done should be undone and wrought again. She sat down in the midst of the shattered ruins and thought her way carefully, as was her wont, out of the confusion of the fallen structure. These dream palaces, wherein she had woven many beautiful fabrics in imagination, were very dear to her; but there was something still dearer, and that was the happiness of her favorite son. When she reviewed the situation calmly she could see where the injustice of this long hoped for consummation of her dearest wishes affected those nearest to her, whose happiness it was her duty to consider; and stoically, as in every other perplexing contingency of her life, she put away that which was agreeable, and faced what she knew to be right with a stern sense of duty. Therefore she did not wait many days before making preparations for the visit she had promised her son. The old colonial town wherein was situated the academy where he was preparing for the college course, that should later fit him for his beloved profession, was only a comfortable drive from Woodley Centre. Francis had taken advantage of an invitation of some weeks' standing to urge his father and mother to drive over on Sunday, attend divine service where all his fellow students worshiped, and, later, dine with him at the home of Professor Gardiner, the father of Margaret.

With all the enthusiasm of a young lover he wished them to see her that he might be justified, in their sight at least, for his powerlessness to resist the fascination of her presence.

Sarah Marsh had never allowed the god of fashion to rule her in the slightest degree. There are some women who drift along easily in their girlhood days, within hailing distance of the latest mode, and then, suddenly becoming aware of the fact that the years are multiplying themselves about their brow, pause abruptly where they are, never to advance again — and she was one of these. The styles that prevailed when she was married were good enough for her, so she still combed her hair in flats closely about her ears, and, though she was yet young enough to look well in any of the charming models of headgear that were popular in the early sixties, was content with reproductions of the scoop-shaped bonnet in which she had driven to church one memorable August morning.

The voluminous skirts and stiff crinolines worn by other women appealed to her not at all. She still cut the skirt of her gown after the slender model that had served so well for her wedding gown, and "gauged" its gathers closely about the pointed bodice above it. A nice black silk, a gift from her husband on the most recent anniversary of their marriage, had been sacrificed to her peculiar ideas in this respect, and formed the nucleus of the costume in which she invested herself for her drive on this bracing winter morning. An expensive long black coat was her outer garment, but its original outlines had been so disfigured by her busy needle and shears that it hung limply down nearly to her knees, where it should have draped her crinoline bouffantly a few inches above her ankles.

Conservativeness had stamped itself upon her apparel and features, as well as on her methods and principles of life; and since her creed taught her that it was right, there was no change possible of her own volition. But in the general upheaval and the startling changes that were to come into her own life, it would be surprising if there were not some regeneration apportioned out as her share.

The white snow lay crusted everywhere over the earth, a beautiful, sparkling covering, and the sleigh-bells jingled merrily under the transparent blueness of the overarching skies. Not many words passed between Abel Marsh and his wife as the horse's hoofs quickly crunched the snow, keeping time to the rhythmic music of the bells. Cheery, voluble, and bluff, in the presence of others, he was invariably silent before this woman.

In his inmost heart he was troubled, direfully troubled, with matters outside his home. His barns and storehouses groaned with repletion, his stock were sleek, smooth, and satisfied, his home snug and comfortable, his family well fed and provided for; yet was he a part of the great throbbing, beating heart of the nation, his individuality helped swell the mighty millions which were its strength, and who struck at that great heart hurt him. The rupture had come. What had seemed but a little rift in the sunny blueness of the kindly skies had grown and darkened until it shadowed every home in all the fertile land. The little inharmonious note, one broken string, had jangled discord in the sweetest hymn by mortals sung, the national hymn of this great united republic. How it would end he did not know, he could not tell. But the foreboding in his heart had silenced his lips.

Broad, peaceful fields of white, holding in their frozen breasts the sleeping life of another beautiful summer, smiled up at them as they passed. Here and there, dark fir trees rose majestically against the mellow skies, a solemn line of sentinels on guard in Winter's palace. Churches, little, white-spined houses of worship, stood with closed doors, all the way. It was yet early in the day and the iron tongues of their bells were spellbound.

From broad chimneys, rising above great sloping roofs of many homes nestled beneath the everlasting hills, thin rings of blue smoke curled away like feathery nothings in the crisp and sparkling air. Homes of New England! Bright, warm, and peaceful on this wintry day, over how many, unseen in the sparkling frostiness of the chilling air, hovered the death angel's wing, aye, and the looming shapes of grim-visaged war and his devastating train?

At ten o'clock they reached the boarding place of their son, where they warmed themselves by a cheerful, snapping wood fire, before starting on the short walk to church. The edifice of the religious society they were to worship with stood just at one side of the village green, facing the rambling brick buildings of the old academy. The church itself, more pretentious than houses of worship usually found in country towns of that period, was painted a dark brown in color, and surmounted by an enormous and far-reaching spire, on the four sides of which the town clock displayed its hands.

Half-past ten found them seated in a high-backed pew in the centre of the church, and shortly after the service began. The pastor, an aged man, tall and spare, with flowing locks of white, took for his text these words: "But what king, going out to make war

against another king, sitteth not down first and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?"

He voiced the unspoken sentiment of all present; deplored the spirit of conflict rife in the world, whereby war was made a necessity, and counselled in all things moderation and long consideration of all sides of the question that agitated and irritated those born in unity, at the present time.

From the venerable patriarch's lips such counsels seemed prophetic, and all hearts thrilled with the sentiments of Christian forbearance and patience taught from the pulpit that morning.

Service over with the singing of the Doxology, they strolled down the long aisle and out through the door, where Francis turned aside to reply to someone who had spoken with him; and in another moment his mother stood face to face with the girl for whom he had given up Hope Hamilton.

"Father—mother—allow me to present you to Professor Gardiner—and Miss Margaret Gardiner. Professor Gardiner—my father. Miss Gardiner—my mother."

Sarah Marsh turned and surveyed curiously the girl, who was saying polite things in response to her son's introduction. It seemed to her that she had never seen such expressive eyes before. Indeed, when they were raised to her face she saw nothing else at first. Deep pools of translucent limpidity smiled up from their brown clearness and, mirror-like, reflected the varying emotions of their owner's mind. The rest of the face finally resolved itself from the mists that had obscured it, and the mother saw an oval visage crowned by wavy hair of a light brown shade. A rather sensitive, spirituelle mouth, and, beneath, a

slender figure, fashionably, more fashionably than was consistent with her code, gowned. She liked the girl's eyes. They appealed to her, softly, silently, asking for love and appreciation, but her rugged conservatism took instant alarm at some of the apparent frivolities of her attire. She was walking along with her now, listening to the silvery voice, modulated to a well-bred cadence and, somehow, she felt that no ringing laugh, free and uncontrolled, like the laughter of Hope, would ever issue from the lips of the girl beside her. She replied in monosyllables to all her entertainer said. She could feel the large eyes search her through and through, and she knew they noted every incongruous detail of her apparel, accentuated as it was by the contrast of her own elegance. But she did not quail. She was here to study this girl and she meant to find out what the subtle charm was which had turned her son from the allegiance of his youth and made void all the vows he had thought so true when he uttered them.

All through the long dinner, of many courses, served with an elaborateness to which she was a stranger, she sat listening to the learned discussion between the host and her younger son, of whom she was very proud, but silent, studying the fair face opposite, so flower-like, yet so elusive in its characteristics that for once she was puzzled.

When the dinner was over, when after a social hour they took their leave, she clasped the hand the girl held out to her gingerly.

"We sh'll all be glad to hev you come to Woodley Centre an' see us," she said, warily. She felt that the invitation was due in payment for what they had this day received and that Francis wished it; but her heart rebelled at the usurpation of Hope's rights and place in her home.

"Thank you. I shall be so pleased."

The voice sounded sweet and sincere, and yet the elder woman felt ringing through it, its gentler note, a tone, veiled by courtesy, of dislike of herself and her homely manners. She knew that the acceptance was thus graciously granted for Francis' sake, and, for his sake also, she would try to make her welcome, even as for his sake she was going to do that which would wring her heart.

Abel Marsh left her for a few moments in her son's room while he went to the barn of a neighbor for the horse and sleigh. When they were alone Francis faced her with shining eyes.

"Well, mother," he said, "what do you think? Isn't she all I painted her to you?"

He was intoxicated by the recently relinquished nearness of her physical presence, her image filled the focus of his vision, and he wanted now that motherly sympathy he had never heretofore solicited in vain.

"Wal, Francis," her eyes fell to the carpet at her feet and she traced its pattern before she continued, "I'm glad you're happy. She seems nice an' she's real pretty, but — but —" her lips trembled slightly, "I was thinkin' o' Hope."

"Forgive me, mother." He stopped in his restless pacing and his eyes dropped sadly, guiltily to the floor. "I had forgotten that. I think after all, it would be better for me to come home and tell her myself. It is too hard to ask you to do it. It is I who have offended, and it is I who should make what reparation lies in my power. And, mother, I must come soon. She writes me such letters, so full of affection and trust, and hope for the future. Mother, Hope is a dear girl."

"I guess I know that."

"It is too bad. I have walked this floor night after night, trying to see some way out of it. I wish—I wish—" sadly, "that I had never been born, to trouble so."

"That ain't right." Sarah Marsh regarded him steadily. "It ain't your fault, Francis, an' I kin see. We all git mixed up in sech things sometimes. It's kinder my fault, too. Ef I hadn't sot such a lot by Hope an' wanted her to come to us so, you wouldn't ever thought o' askin' her to marry you. You done it to please me. I kin see it now. You never really wanted her. 'Twas to please me, an' it's right for me to be the one to haf to tell her. I must do it. I couldn't let you, Francis."

He felt the truth of what she had said, and yet it did not seem just right to him that this burden should fall on his mother. But she silenced him.

"You 'n I believe alike 'bout love, Francis. It can't no more be turned away from the one that's got it an' given to somebody else than you can turn winter into summer or night into day. It's a burden laid on all on us, an' it's our happiness an' our curse. We've got to make someone happy and someone else mis'able. It's part o' the plan, I s'pose. I'll tell Hope myself. I want to. She'll take it better from me than she would from you. 'Twon't hurt her so."

"Be sure and tell her," his voice broke and he could not finish the sentence.

"I know," soothingly, as she rose to her feet at the sound of sleighbells, "there's father now. Don't you worry, Francis. I know both of ye, an' I'll tell her jest what'll make her feel the best to you. Trust me for that."

She raised the heavily embroidered lace veil that dangled from the wide brim of her bonnet, and dropped a kiss lightly on the cheek that was turned toward her. Much as she loved him, this was the first time she had kissed him since he could remember, and for reply he threw both arms around her neck and returned the caress, over and over again.

And after she had gone he stood by the window disconsolately, both hands deep in his trousers' pockets, and murmured, "Poor old mother. Can it be that I am growing away from them all? God forbid," and he put the thought from him.

Thus love is not all sweetness and pleasure, even though we love and are beloved again.

CHAPTER VIII

SARAH MARSH sent for Hope to come and see her, a few days after her return from the visit to the academy. Francis had written that he should return home for the Christmas holidays, and he hoped to have the pleasure of introducing Margaret Gardiner to the old home and his brother Phil at that time. Though he did not mention Hope's name, his mother knew that he desired to have their relative positions for the future defined absolutely before his visit should be made. And she, too, felt that it would be as well, since no change was now possible. The matter had been prayed over, thought of, and regarded from every standpoint possible; and, stripped of all apologizing, circumstances, and circumlocution, had resolved itself into the bare fact that the affections of Francis had never really been engaged by the girl who was so good a comrade but whose attractiveness as compared with that of the girl he had recently met was as "moonlight unto sunlight" or as "water unto wine."

The homely sitting-room looked very comfortable at Hope stepped from the snapping coldness of the street into its well warmed interior. A big fire of birch logs was burning in the airtight stove, crackling and spitting forth little jets of flame, and the whole surface of the stove fairly sang with the genial heat stored within. The afternoon sun slanted across the panes of the south window and touched the face of Sarah Marsh, who was sitting there, an immense basket of stockings by her side on the floor and a ball

of coarse blue yarn in the lap of her gingham apron. On the window sill beside her sat her pincushion, the lower part of an old glass lamp, whose top had been fitted to a hard round cushion of emery covered with a bit of red flannel. This bristled with needles of every size, and pins, while, perched on its apex, her "side thimble," at present not in use, reposed. The smooth bands of her dark hair were thickly sprinkled with gray, and there were tense lines about the rather wide mouth, telling of an unalterable decision of character as well as of silently fought battles. She turned a pair of keen light eyes to the doorway, where the girl stood silhouetted against the dimness of the outer room.

It was a bright face she saw, cheeks reddened by her long walk against boisterous winds of winter, and eyes shining with the reflection of the sparkling sun outside. A soft little quilted hood of cherry-colored silk had fallen back over the girl's hair, revealing its lustrous waves, glinting and glistening where the sun had kissed them. She had thrown aside a long outer cape of gray material displaying, beneath, the voluminous skirt of her warm-hued gown, matching in shade the hood she wore.

She made a brilliant picture against the dull background, the hueless furnishings of the room, and the elder woman's characterless attire. Only the sunlight—and one bright lance danced and glimmered across the floor till it lay in long lines across her gown—seemed sympathetic with the brightness of her personality.

"I have come, you see," she began, briskly, and then, removing her wrappings, she passed with them through the sitting-room and into the parlor bedroom beyond, where she laid them on the bed. Returning,

she drew a low chair up to the mending basket and, having selected a needle from the cushion in the window, began to weave in and out the coarse woolen yarn across a monster hole in one of Abel Marsh's stockings. Sarah Marsh looked down at the bright, soft waves of hair beneath the level of her eye, to ask, "You heard from Francis, lately, Hope?"

"Oh, yes," laughingly, "such a formal little letter! Just a few words. He is coming home for the holidays. Did he tell you?" glancing lightly up into the elder woman's face.

"Ye-us," slowly. And then, "Hev you noticed anythin' different 'bout Francis lately, Hope? I mean, do his letters seem the same to you?"

The girl looked up with wondering eyes, but something in the elder woman's voice had given instant alarm, for she answered, gravely, "They have been shorter. I thought, of course, he was studying so hard—he had not time to write. Mother Marsh," it was her name for the elder woman, "what do you mean? There is something. You sent for me this afternoon to tell me something, I am sure of it."

The other woman was still silent. She felt that the knowledge would force itself into the girl's heart, without words of hers, and she did not speak.

"Is it that," falteringly, "that—he does not care—he wants to be free? Sometimes I have suspected—there have been letters lately that have not seemed the same—but you know how trusting I am, and I could not think that of him."

She hesitated, and Sarah Marsh took up her words where they had fallen from her lips. "I ain't asayin' anythin' for him, Hope. I don't want you to think that I approve of what he's done, but it's too late now for me to help it. You see, goin' away

to school as he's done, somehow, it made him different, an' he ain't to blame — but he met this girl an' that's what she's done for him — bewitched him."

A great sadness had settled over the girl's face.

"No, it isn't that," she was very positive in her reply, "he never cared for me, as," her lip trembled, "as I did for him. But I can let him go. I am not weak. Will you tell him, for me," she rose to her feet and faced the other woman proudly, "that he is free."

Sarah Marsh dropped her work unheeded to the floor as she, too, arose and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"Oh, Hope," she said, simply, "you ain't agoin' to leave us like this, be you? You mustn't blame him too much — 'cause — 'twas my fault."

"Your fault?" She repeated the words incredulously, resentfully.

"Ye-us," slowly, "when he found it out — that he cared for this girl — he wanted to tell you himself, said he'd orter, 'cause he was the one thet had done wrong an' made you suffer — an' — an' I wouldn't let him, 'cause — I thought it was my fault."

"Your fault?" Again the girl repeated the words wonderingly, but there was less of incredulousness in her tone.

"My fault," echoed the elder woman, with falling intonation. "I wanted him to love you, Hope, because" — the words came hard through the icy crust of her reserve — "because I did. I never had no girls of my own, Hope, an' — an' — I wanted one, one I knew, one I loved — and you seemed so near like what my own little girl would have been if I'd hed one, that I wanted Francis to marry you an' then I could hev you for my very own. An' Francis

—he's a good boy an' has been to me always—the rest don't understand him same's I do—an' allus hev. He wanted to please me—he liked you—but—” sadly, “as I've hed good cause to know in my own life, child—likin' ain't lovin'—an', strange 's it may seem, much as I'd ruther had you myself, Hope—an' I don't like her very well—he loves her—an'—likely—love goes where it's sent, they say. You ain't agoin' to leave us because it's come so—air you, Hope?”

The girl had stood silent while the woman she had hoped to call mother pleaded with her. Now she turned a pained, tear-stained face to the imploring eyes above her own.

“No,” she said, tremblingly. “I see how it is, and, Mother Marsh, I'll try to be just the same to you all.”

Sarah Marsh clasped the shrinking form close in her strong arms, and stroked the soft masses of chestnut hair till the storm had spent itself. She knew how hard it was to bear. She felt the force of the blow that had shattered this girl's dream; for she, too, had dreamed dreams and they had been broken on the cruel rack of time and trouble. But she also knew what was best, and so she said words of strong encouragement when the girl's sobs had grown less.

“All sech things are hard to bear,” she said, “but it's a good deal better to know it now than 'twould be ef you hed waited till you was married, p'raps, an' then found out thet he'd lied an' hid it from you, thet he cared more for somebody else than he did for you. It would of come out—sech things are bound to. I always brought up my boys—both on 'em—to speak the truth—yes, and to live it. Sometimes it hurts worse at the time of it, but in the

long run it's always better. Now you'll stay to supper. It's closin' in mighty airly tonight, an' it'll be pitch dark soon. You'd better stay an' eat with us, an' then Phil'll carry you home."

After some further persuasion Hope decided to stay; but throughout the evening meal, which she helped Mrs. Marsh to prepare, a suddenly acquired silence hung about her. 'Scilla, too, was unusually subdued, and answered hardly a word to the boisterous jokes of Abel Marsh or the more gently expressed humor of Phil, when the men came in to supper. The keen eye of Phil Marsh had detected a change in the sunny temper of the girl, and he took extra pains to cover with his own cheerful banter any personal remarks his father might have addressed to her.

Very soon after supper she expressed a desire to return home. In a few moments Ephraim had put old Roan into the sleigh and Phil had handed her carefully in and tucked the buffalo around her. When he was seated he shook the reins over the back of the powerful horse, and he started off at a loping trot, gently jangling the tuneful bells at every stride of his muscular limbs.

"I don't expect to have this task always," Phil remarked, pleasantly, as the sleigh slipped easily over the snowy earth.

"Why?" the girl sighed a little as she asked the question.

"Because I expect sometime, Hope, you will belong to us for good, and then, heigho! for an end to all these pleasant drives which I take, by proxy, with you."

The starlight was brilliant in the skies above, and by its radiance he saw a strange little smile flit across her mobile face.

"Oh, yes, you will, Phil," she answered him, bravely, "you will always have these trips to make — that is, until you tire of them — because — because," the hesitating voice dropped a little, "I am not coming for good."

For a few seconds Phil Marsh drove along in silence, as if to invite her further confidence, then he asked, kindly, "Why, how is that?"

"I want you to know, Phil, and I want to tell you myself — so you will not blame him. Your mother sent for me this afternoon, to tell me that Francis desired to be released from his engagement to me. He has met someone he likes better," sadly and simply.

Phil Marsh turned to her indignantly, stung by the tremor of her voice, the sad little droop at the corners of her mouth.

"And is not my brother," he demanded, sharply, "man enough to tell you this himself, without leaving it to mother to bear the news of his changeable affections to you?"

A soft hand was laid pleadingly on his arm and a pair of troubled eyes looked up into his face.

"You must not blame him so, Phil," she reproached him, "it was not his fault. It is one of the things that happen sometimes and are so hard to bear. There is no blame anywhere, and the pain of it, to me, is inevitable. Your mother, Phil, loved me, I seemed like a daughter she had always wanted, and Francis was young, impressionable, and very much under his mother's influence. Really, as I look at it now, I can see that he was not in any way blameable. It was all my fault, Phil." Unconsciously she clasped her hands tightly about his arm. "I — I cared too much for him, and I did not ask myself — or him — if his love for me was as true."

A few bright drops glistened in the girl's eyes and then sparkled on the coat sleeve of the young man beside her. He noticed them in the starlight and turned to her impulsively.

"Don't, Hope—don't feel that way, please. It hurts me, too. I wish I could help you."

"No one can help me." She turned her eyes away from him. "I must bear it alone. But, Phil, you cannot know, for you have never cared—as I have—how humiliating it is, nor how I dread the future."

A grim smile drew sharp lines about Phil Marsh's mouth. He dropped the reins idly into his lap, and the old horse, with head down and steady gait, kept the straight road.

"I have half a mind," he said, suddenly, "to tell you my love story."

"Your love story?" The girl looked up at him an instant, wondering.

"Yes, mine. I must have hidden it carefully, indeed, if you have not suspected its existence. I, too, Hope, loved and still love a girl who is as ignorant of my feelings for her as a babe unborn. For years I have lived near her, mingled in the same society, attended the same merrymakings, treasured up all the kind words she has said to me, eaten at the same table, and sat round the same firelight, and yet she was as far removed from me as if oceans rolled between, because she loved and was promised to my brother."

"Oh, Phil." The low voice was full of pain.

"Yes, and I have borne it patiently, but never hopefully. And now, when I see the bond that separated us broken suddenly, it does not make me glad, because I know that my affection is still as hopeless as

when I first conceived it. She still loves, though she is no longer bound to, my brother."

The last word had an inquiring inflection, and she answered him, humbly, "Yes, Phil."

He picked up the reins, slapped them briskly over the sleek sides of old Roan as he continued:

"Therefore I have vowed that I would never annoy her with the story of my vain affection, and she would not have heard it tonight but that I felt that she had need of something to buoy her courage up. I want her to be my sister, if she will, the daughter of my mother, to fill the same place in the old home she has always had — its sun, around which we lesser planets revolve contentedly, and when she is in trouble or unhappy to come to me, if she will."

For one brief instant she regarded the boyish face, under her drooping lashes. There were no sentiments expressed there but honesty and perfect frankness.

"I am so sorry, if you do care, Phil," she said. "I did not know. You never seemed to care. But I am glad you told me. I shall be braver. Please don't think I shall desert you or your family, Phil. I think I see it rightly now, and I shall be the same to you — to them — to him — aye, even to her — if she will let me."

"You are better than I am, Hope. I couldn't do that."

"Oh, yes, you could." The girl's eyes shone again with her admiration of him. "You are so strong and brave, Phil. It is I who am weak. But I shall remember, and Phil," the horse had stopped now before the door of her home, "I can almost find it in my heart to wish I cared for you as you deserve to be loved."

"God knows, I wish you did. But you know best, and I can do without it, Hope, if it is written so."

He laughed shortly as he leaped lightly to the ground to assist her. At the gate he clasped her hand tightly. "Good-night, little sister," he said, softly; and she returned the pressure. "Good-night, Phil — dear brother," she replied.

CHAPTER IX

FROM the bitter cold outside Ephraim Binks stepped into the more freezing atmosphere of the interior of the little white schoolhouse on the hill. Having divested himself of a huge pair of gray woollen mittens, he proceeded to unwind from his neck coil after coil of a long, worsted comforter of gaudy hues. This was followed by a fur cap with earlaps, and a short, rough coat of the sort usually adopted by woodchoppers in the forest. Freed from these wrappings, Ephraim stood for a moment, in the centre of the schoolroom floor, blowing his reddened fingers vigorously, with puffed-out cheeks.

Then he went to work briskly to make a fire in the great box stove in the corner, having previously lighted the tall lamp, which he set on the teacher's desk. As he worked he mumbled to himself over and over, continuously, a few lines of poetry. He was memorizing, or, rather, striving to retain what he had already learned, a recitation which he intended to deliver tonight at the speaking school. For weeks had he burned the midnight oil preparatory to this effort, and night after night, in the narrow confines of his room, had he paced the floor, repeating, with suitable gestures, the lines he was to speak to-night.

Occasionally, as he carried great logs to feed the schoolroom fire, he would extract from his pocket the piece of paper whereon, in a hand resembling hieroglyphics, he had copied his "piece." His would

be the triumph, he assured himself, tonight when, having delivered himself of this gem of literature, he should step down from the platform, blushing, it is true, but amid the plaudits of the onlookers. He had seen many a deserving effort thus rewarded and had envied the youthful orator who had drawn upon himself those enthusiastic marks of approbation. This was to be the night of his life. If this would not move the stony heart of the girl he loved, nothing would; but, in his opinion, this would suffice.

He had borne snubs, indifference, and even the episode of the snowstorm had failed to remove from 'Scilla's eyes the glamour woven there by the attentions of the musical stranger. Ephraim's honest heart throbbed with indignation, because he could appreciate, what the girl could not, the insincerity and half humorous aspect of the professor's wooing; and he knew, what she did not, the difference between the straightforward worship proffered by even the most humble suitor and the almost insulting courtesies of which she was the object.

Absent-mindedly he took off one of the stove lids to drop in some chips he had gathered up from the floor, and, his mind still intent on the all-absorbing topic which had occupied it, he let fall the crumpled bit of paper he had been holding tightly. In an instant it was licked greedily up by the darting tongues of the great flame.

"By gosh," ruefully, as he surveyed the holocaust, "thar goes my piece. Well, by gum, I know it all, so I kin do 'thout it."

The door opened and in walked Eli Abbot, Nathan Drake, and John Dale, with his inevitable horsewhip.

"Hullo, Eph. Got it pretty warm in here. It feels good, though—"

He snapped the whip loudly in Ephraim's ears, then set it up in the corner, while he extended his hands over the grateful warmth.

"Pretty cold night." Selectman Drake nodded affably to Ephraim while he rubbed the end of a rather prominent nose with each hand alternately, warming the one not in use.

"Yes, sir."

Ephraim busied himself about the stove and with the lights, but not a word of what was being discussed there escaped him. Presently Abel Marsh, with Phil "flanking his rear," as he himself expressed it, came in; and then once again the door was opened and Solomon Penny sent a long, preliminary roar ahead of his presence, to those about the stove.

"Hello, all!" he shouted, and his raucous voice echoed weirdly under the low ceiling and into the farthest corners of the room. Presently he shuffled into view, stamping his feet loudly, and followed closely by Solon Wiseman, who looked blue and ill-clad in contrast to the rest of the group.

"What's the subject under discussion tonight?" asked Solomon Penny, as the group widened a little to make room for him.

"Oh, politics, as usual," John Dale assured him, cheerily. "You know, we never meet but we discuss that subject."

"We was a talkin'," Eli Abbot narrowed his eyes to a squint, "when you come in, about the se-ce-din' of the state of South Carlina. Some on us maintains she has the right—or any other state—to draw out o' the Union. I say she hain't." He lifted the stove lid and disgorged an immense quid of tobacco into the fire.

"Wal, I dunno," Solomon Penny seemed to be turning the question over in his mind. "It's jest like this. It all depends on what you mean by the Union. If you mean that we're all one country bound together, hard an' fast, an' all governed by the same laws, why then, o' course, no one hain't a right to withdraw themself. But," here he raised his voice so that its tones were sharply distinct and reverberated within the walls of the building, "ef you say, an' there's them—lots of 'em—that do say, that this Union is only jining of a lot of states together for mootual benefit, an' it's somethin' like marriage—when one party gits tired I guess it kin withdraw if it wants to."

The rest of the company looked slightly shocked, but they all knew Solomon Penny, and were well aware that though he loudly voiced some startling principles, at heart he was all right and, whatever he said, would do the right thing upon occasion.

Ephraim hovered on the outskirts of the group, listening eagerly to all they said. This subject, agitating, as it did, the greatest minds in the country, touched his simple nature deeply, and he forgot all else while men whom he considered of superior intellect to himself talked it over in all its bearings.

"I hold," said Nathan Drake, solemnly, shaking his head at the heresy of Penny, "that this nation is a unit, even as every man's family, though composed of different members, is a unit, and cannot be dissolved." He looked rebukingly at Solomon Penny as he concluded.

"Oho," the storekeeper laughed loudly, "then if one of your sons got tired of your rule—an' set out for himself—you'd go after him an' bring him back, an' make him live in the same house with you?"

"I certainly should," returning his stare imperturbably, "unless he was of age."

"Wal, I shouldn't." Penny closed the front draft in the stove with a vicious click. "Ef 'twas my son, or my wife, it's all the same. When they're tired, they kin go an' that's all there is to it."

"P'raps South Carliny's of age," piped a thin voice, and they looked around to see Solon Wiseman standing just behind the stove pipe.

"Thawed out, eh, Sol?" asked Abel Marsh, with a gruff laugh, and Phil said, approvingly, "that's a good one, for you, Sol. Short speech, but a good deal in it."

"Sol's name didn't belie him this time," John Dale made a quick motion, like snapping his whip on the heel of his boot, and looked longingly toward the corner; but having put away from him, for a time, his inseparable companion, he would not allow himself to be tempted. "Seems to me," he continued, ruminatively, "states 're a good deal like colts. You kin do all you want to for some on 'em, an' they'll turn out to be pesky, vicious, bucking critters; an' others, you kin jest let 'em come up, an' they're all right. Take to trainin' naterally, as it were. And," he concluded decisively, "tain't no use to try to train a nag that's got that vicious devil in his eye. It'll come out sooner or later. You can't break 'em. Better let 'em go to the devil."

The opening of the door put a sudden period to this remark. John Sherburne, his unusual pallor enhanced by contact with the stinging air outside, came noiselessly into the schoolroom. Abel Marsh turned to him boisterously.

"Come, Sherburne," he called out, "you settle this for this pack o' numbskulls. Has one o' the

states of this union got any right, morally, religiously, or politically, to git out of it? Come, say," and he slapped him familiarly on the back.

The schoolmaster's face reddened a little under the sudden assault, as he turned aside to the little group.

"I am studying for the ministry," he said, slowly, "and should, I suppose, counsel peace. I do not feel competent to judge of the actions of my brother men, or the different states of my country. But if the whole country, to which I am loyal, says that one of its members shall not — must not — secede, before I would see one of its venerated institutions tampered with, I would shed every drop of blood in my body, in an effort to obey her divine command."

It was a long speech for him and the effort was obviously labored.

"Good," muttered Phil Marsh, under his breath.

John Sherburne quitted the little group with his accustomed quietness of motion, and went to the desk on the platform, where he was to preside over the evening's exercises.

"Didn't know he had so much grit," murmured Solomon Penny, and John Dale chuckled as if he were urging a racing horse down the speedway. "He's got trottin' blood in him somewheres," he whispered, with an admiring glance at the schoolmaster's desk, "nobody 'd ever suspect it, though."

"'Cause he's so all-fired still," growled Abel Marsh.

One by one there entered into the schoolhouse the larger part of the inhabitants of the village, and took their places. Hope Hamilton, a little more sedate than usual, but with a pleasant smile for everybody, came in with her bosom friend, Laura Gra-

hame. When nearly everyone else was seated, there was a little rustle at the door, through which presently came Francis Marsh, who, true to his promise, was at home for the holidays, and the girl of his later choice. She was gowned richly in dark clothes, her neck muffled in a huge fur collar whose long ends reached her knees, and she carried in one hand a monster muff, whose heavy silk tassels dangled by her side. A little flat hat, of velvet, sat coquettishly on her silky hair, from under the smoothly-drawn bands of which looked forth the fathomless eyes which were her most potent charm.

They took their places quietly, as if unaware that every pair of eyes in the room, save one, were leveled directly at them.

A good many of the young people of Woodley Centre volunteered their services at these entertainments, and the result was that an enjoyable evening was passed in a place where criticism was well-nigh impossible, since all who assisted in the program were well supplied with relatives or friends in the audience. A list of the participants, with their especial assignment, was laid before John Sherburne, who called the names as they appeared there. There had been already three contributors to the pleasure of the evening when the schoolmaster called, "Ephraim Binks. Selected."

There was a little hush of expectancy, and while it lasted the schoolroom door opened once more and Professor Hemilstross emerged from the grim shadows that infested the entry. He stalked directly across the floor, deposited a leather instrument case by the side of one of the unoccupied seats, and himself sank into it without glancing at those who were regarding him interestedly.

'Scilla Hickins, who was seated with four or five other girls, about in the centre of the room, nudged one of her companions with her elbow, and uttered a suppressed giggle.

Then arose Ephraim manfully from his seat, his face glowing with embarrassment and excitement, and made his way stumblingly to the platform. He missed its exact height by about a half an inch, bringing the toe of his heavy boot into contact with the hard wood with one resounding bump that echoed far and wide. He wanted someone to laugh then. It would have relieved the nervous tension of his feelings. But a silence as grim as that which falls when, before the bar of justice, one accused waits for the verdict that shall seal his fate, settled over the room. No one whispered, no one moved. It seemed that no one breathed, even. A pin might have been heard had one fallen. All were waiting for Ephraim to distinguish himself.

After one more unsuccessful effort, he finally raised his foot above the level of the platform and, mounting it, took his place. With right arm extended, he drew back his left foot, the toe of its boot grating harshly across the projecting nails in the well-worn boards, and made a sweeping courtesy.

Then, in a voice that penetrated the farthest corner of the room, he announced the title of his piece: "We are all here."

From the long black locks, carefully oiled down on each side of his forehead, over his florid, well filled out face, all through the length of his arms, covered with a pair of knit wristers up to where his coat sleeves were too abbreviated to connect, then along the line of his short trousers, "hitched 'way up with his galluses," as Abel Marsh afterward ex-

pressed it, even down to the wide toe of his greased "stogy" boots, Ephraim thrilled. And the audience waited, waited in silence, for the rest of his recitation.

The title was also the first line of the piece. He had repeated that once, so he was sure of it. "We are all here." Then he hesitated, a look of consternation spread over his features, and he muttered, under his breath, "By jingoes! Gosh darn it all!"

Suddenly his face lightened.

"Father, mother, brother, sister — we're all here," he bawled, loudly. Then another blank. Still the audience were silent. In a less confident tone, Ephraim ventured again, hoping the right words would follow involuntarily.

"We're all here."

He looked helplessly around on the sea of faces. All were obliterated by the embarrassment of his position, save that of Professor Hemilstross. That stood out, defiant, mocking, tantalizing.

He gulped down a big sob that rose in his throat and began it all over again.

"We're all here."

Then he rushed recklessly into the few words that had survived his interest in secession and his embarrassment at the inopportune entrance of his rival, and he sing-songed lustily, "We are all here. Father, mother, brother, sister — we're all here."

Then he paused; the blank refused to fill itself.

"We are all here," he faltered lamely, and Professor Hemilstross sneered in an undertone, "Evidently. What next?" while John Sherburne stepped down from the desk and, going to Ephraim's side, asked him, kindly, "Have you a copy of the piece with you? I might prompt."

"Gosh dang it all! I burned the blamed thing up," blurted Ephraim, and he stamped down from the platform amid a roar of deafening laughter and clapping hands. Going over to his desk, he sat with his head in his hands, while the rest of the entertainment proceeded. He had heard the low hiss of the professor as he turned away from the platform, and he burned for revenge.

Toward the last of the program, John Sherburne raised his head and announced, "Professor Hemil-stross has kindly consented to favor us with a cornet solo."

Ephraim raised his head from its dejected attitude. His eyes sparkled. "I thought so," he muttered, "good thing I come prepared."

As the professor, after extracting his cornet from its case, stepped gracefully upon the platform, Ephraim Binks arose from his seat and, tramping down the aisle, sat down in one of the front seats, directly under the eyes of the performer. He took something out of his pocket and calmly putting it into his mouth, began to extract its juice with a loud noise. It was a lemon.

The professor waved his cornet gracefully around once in an ellipse, then, daintily raising it to his mouth, essayed to blow the opening notes of an aria from *Trovatore*. But his eyes dropped to the level of Ephraim's face as if fascinated, and the note died away in a horrible murmur. He removed the cornet, blew in it, and shook it carefully free of all moisture. He raised it once more, fingered the keys lightly and blew the first note. It rasped shiveringly and sounded hoarse and croaking. His eyes still fell on Ephraim, contentedly sucking the lemon, and still saliva trickled down the depths of the shining instrument, and he could not play.

He grew hot and nettled. His light hair bristled angrily and his narrow eyes shot sparks of fire. Then Ephraim coolly put the lemon out of sight and whispered audibly to Phil Marsh, sitting near, "Thar! Gosh dang him! He knows how 'tis himself now." The professor withered him with a glance, then proceeded with his solo, which was received with rapturous applause. As this was the final number of the program there was an immediate bustle and rising from seats as the audience prepared to separate.

John Sherburne came down from the desk and mingled with the departing townspeople. He spoke kindly to Hope and her companion, and a little expression of disappointment flitted across Laura Graham's face as he turned up the collar of his overcoat and started on the lonesome tramp to his present boarding place. Hope bravely ushered her friend into the group surrounding the Marshes and introduced her to Margaret Gardiner, whom she had previously met. Francis flashed her a grateful smile as she did this, which was harder to bear than openly expressed disapproval or indifference.

She was trying to make it easier for him, for them, and their kindly expressed approbation stung her to the quick. Yet the ever ready smile, the word of banter, covered her real feelings, and already the neighbors had begun to whisper, "She does not care. She never did."

Phil came quietly to her and offered his services as escort to the two girls, both of whom accepted gratefully, though one had sent her heart after the solemn figure striding away into the darkness and the cold.

Ephraim Binks waited in the entry, fur cap, comforter, and mittens in hand, until Scilla made her appearance.

"Can I go home with you, 'Scilla?" he inquired, humbly.

"No, you cayn't. So there — an' don't you ask me agin, Eph Binks."

'Scilla snapped out her reply sharply with a toss of her head, and Ephraim turned from her and was soon busy winding the folds of the gay comforter about his neck and ears, over his fur cap. Then he drew on his gray wool mittens and stepped outside the door. Presently 'Scilla came forth with shining eyes and crimson cheeks, and by her side walked the soloist of the evening.

Ephraim felt in his pocket for the schoolhouse key, turned it in the lock, and went down the steps and into the night, for this once vanquished, crushed, and disheartened.

CHAPTER X

IT was a winter of unrest. The dark clouds that had gathered low on the political horizon in the early fall were spreading, and, reaching out, threatened to envelop the bluer skies of even the most hopeful. There were those who still clung to the delusion that all this, like an angry "squall," would blow over, but they failed to take into consideration that a storm which has brewed for half a century does not blow over in half a year.

Events of national importance make as keen an impression on the inhabitants of the remotest hamlets as on those of the great capital itself. All over the country, people waited in suspense for the ensuing sequence of events. There were thirty-three stars in Old Glory's folds. How many would there be in a year from today? There were traitors in high places, spies abroad, through all the land; and already national credit tottered on its insecure foundation. Low murmurings of the gathering storm reached Woodley Centre and the Marsh home, causing there, as in all the homes of the great land, a feeling of profound depression, mingled with hopefulness that the clear head, kindly heart, and firm hand at the helm of the ship of state might eventually guide her past the rocky reefs, over the treacherous sandbars, and to a secure haven under cloudless skies.

Sometimes news direct from the troublous districts reached the broad farmhouse under the shadow of the eternal, peaceful hills of New England. Colored refugees fleeing from their servitude, trailing

their bonds in the dust of the freer soil, came in the night to the threshold of the farmhouse. Its doors were thrown wide, succor and refreshment furnished, and the fugitive passed along to some other household known to be in sympathy with his wrongs and his escape. All this was done privately and under the cover of darkness and, invariably, Ephraim Binks was the one selected to rise from his warm bed in the middle of the night and drive, perhaps, many miles over the frozen ground or through soft masses of snow to the next station, as it was called, of the underground railroad.

As he drove along by the side of his dusky charge, his curiosity found vent in innumerable questions, all of which were answered in detail with true African volubility; so that the simple heart of Ephraim throbbed and thrilled with his primitively acquired sense of the injustice done the black man. All these months had he stored up every story of wrong, every little incident bearing on the complex questions now agitating the population of the great united country; and though he failed of comprehension where the infinitesimal ramifications of the subject were concerned, he imbibed with each lesson great draughts of patriotism, and that enthusiasm so necessary when one is to be called upon to be ready to die for one's country.

There was plenty of manliness in the makeup under the uncouth exterior of this youth, scarcely past the milestone of his majority, and the fires of courage and love of country burned fiercely in his breast. His was an impulsive, ardent nature, with all its rough accoutrements, and the coldness and indifference of the buxom, red-cheeked girl to whom he had given in full the first love of his untried heart had wounded him deeply.

He loved his country; he loved this girl. He was willing to die, if need be, for either; and time alone would show how grateful either would be for the unselfish devotion of this unselfish heart.

Matters stood thus all through the winter, with its short, biting days and the long nights of intense cold and darkness. Spelling matches, speaking schools, debating clubs, "sociables," donation parties, and, occasionally, lectures and concerts, followed one another in swift rotation; and all of them, as was the custom in Woodley Centre, Ephraim attended promptly.

'Scilla, too, was there with unfailing regularity and, like a shadow, the ruddy countenance and slender build of Professor Hemilstross were always to be seen in close proximity. His attentions to the girl puzzled Ephraim, much as they wounded him. But she was evidently complimented by them, so much so that Ephraim spent many miserable days and nights at the farmhouse, where they divided the heavy work of the household and where they were forced to eat and sit together.

If Sarah Marsh noticed this little by-play, she let it pass. Her mind was too busy with affairs of more importance to her. She had tried hard to like Margaret Gardiner, when she had come there for a little visit during the holidays, but had failed miserably. She realized how essential it was, considering her great love for Francis, and the existence of the soul bond that was perfect understanding between them, that her nature should also be attuned to that of the girl he was going to marry. But, with the obstinate pertinacity of a woman of such stern convictions as hers had always been, her heart still reverted to the old cry, uttered only in the stillness of her own soul

and when none of mortal ken might suspect, "Oh, if it had only been Hope! How I could have loved her, how she would have understood me!"

She pitied Hope. She was witness to the great struggle going on in the girl's heart, foreshadowed in her eyes, which no longer smiled in unison with her lips, but gave the lie, with their deep shadows of suffering, to every rippling laugh she uttered.

Francis Marsh struggled all that long winter between the exultation of his first real taste of the knowledge of love as it was when true and lasting, and the depression superinduced by the feeling that he had of the bitter injustice of his course toward Hope. He blamed himself impartially for mistaking the spurious for the real affection, for thinking the love of a brother for a very dear sister could approach in brilliance the radiance of that love which shines unasked, unsought, upon two hearts—and they are one.

He knew how indissoluble such a bond was, how absolutely impossible it was to rebel against the decree that had bidden him love this girl, how unexplainable it was that, much as he desired in all things to please his mother, painful as it was to him to cause sadness to the dear girl he still loved as a sister, that he was still powerless to take a different course. Had he and Margaret loved each other in some dim mistiness of past ages, before either of them had been sentient creatures of earthly existence, had they been destined for each other, their two lives linked by the golden chain of love immortal, eternal, indissoluble? If he had remained true to Hope in the accepted sense of the word, he would still love Margaret, and his soul, his æsthetic nature, would be as they had always been, in keen sympathy with her love for him.

A sort of an unrecorded compact had been entered into between him and Hope, that they should still preserve friendly relations, and so Margaret Gardiner had not suspected half of the misery her presence and her usurpation of the position that had been so long the prerogative of another had caused. She had gone home with Francis for the holidays to please him. But she recognized in him a superior mentality, a certain fineness of difference from the rest of his family, that had escaped all but herself. He was with them, not of them; and their surroundings were incongruous to her personality. Their home life did not appeal to her as it did to Hope, on account of its beautiful simplicity and the sacredness of its revered traditions; but rather repelled her, because of its lack of some of the more essential qualities of her own idea of culture. Refinement, elegance, and the polished mannerisms of the newer régime, which had not as yet reached out and included Woodley Centre and the Marsh home, were her criterions of judgment. She could forgive lack of means, but not the absence of classical culture, such as she had found in the higher circles of the conservative old town whose centre and sun was the academy of learning.

Hope had noted this finely jarring discord in the lives of her friends, this one little jangling note that set all the rest at variance, and had looked on with saddening eyes at the tiny rift in the blue, the entering of the thin wedge's edge of what was as yet only an ethereal disagreement. She had loved Francis Marsh with all the strength of her loyal nature and she was his equal in every way. Her father was a gentleman of the old school, her mother a silvery-haired lady with gentle, beseeching eyes, and they

dwelt in one of those substantial old mansions that have always been the bulwarks as they are the landmarks of New England civilization.

From them she had inherited a good intellect, kindly heart, a strictly moral sense of right and wrong, and the buoyant heart of jollity that a consciousness of peace and plenty had fostered in their lives. She had been well educated and thoroughly trained in all that pertained to the thrifty arts of housewifery. She could knit, embroider, crochet, and sew; and her pies, cakes, and bread would, as they often did, take the first prize at the annual county fair.

The dissolving of the bond between Francis Marsh and herself had been a bitter, humiliating blow to her. In a few words, quietly uttered, she had acquainted her parents with the fact of her changed relations, and they had accepted it stolidly, philosophically, as they did everything. She went about with all of her accustomed blitheness of manner, and was unchanged to them. So, with the reserve that is natural to the primitive stock, they did not question her further, and never suspected the aching heart that hid beneath her ready smile.

To her intimate friend, Laura Grahame, she confided more freely her feelings, after the manner of girls. And there she found the ready sympathy, the clinging arms, that comforted her so. On that throbbing breast she sobbed out all her grief, and the ready tears of her friend mingled with her own.

"I know—I know, my dearest," and a soft hand strayed over her dusky locks, "I know, I can feel what it is to have all the affections of your tender heart thrust back upon yourself. I know what it is to feel the humiliation, the deep insult, of despised love. I have suffered it, too."

A bright gleam of outraged affection shot into her eyes for a moment, surprising Hope. She raised her eyes to the face of her friend and sought there to read her story.

"You think, Hope, because I am always merry, always smiling, that I have no trouble. Oh, how I have hated myself when I thought how I allowed my heart to go out, unsought, unasked! Why, he does not even see me, sometimes."

She laughed a little bitter, mirthless laugh, that smote Hope's heart.

"Is it—is it—" she hesitated, tremulously.

"You know," sadly, "everyone knows. I am not an adept at hiding my preference, if I do my pain. It is John Sherburne, cold, feelingless, indifferent. Why I should care is a mystery to me."

So the knowledge of their mutually unrequited love brought these girls more closely together and they continued to exchange confidences, sacred, sweet, that to all the rest of the world were as hidden secrets.

And thus the winter wore away. In February, soft smiles began to part the gloomy, graying clouds overhead, and a great warm light from the bountiful heart of the source of all life mellowed the wintry atmosphere, bursting the bonds of the imprisoned streamlets and sending them rushing riotously to the great, waiting bosom of the ocean. Down deep into the earth, this radiant beam from the heart of nature's sun penetrated, unclasping the clinging fingers of the frost king from the sleeping flowers and bidding them wake to new life. And their buds swelled, in obedience to the great principle of life, which is love, and waited for the time of their unfolding.

March brought gray skies and blustering winds; but dull gold burst through the murky clouds and the

winds were tempered with the breath of the south-land. And here and there, where barren hillsides held up their seared breasts to the changing skies, little spots of green appeared, soft and mossy, covering the scarred earth beneath and draping the ungainliness of the storm-beaten soil with a covering of wondrous loveliness.

One day in the bleak month some tiny green leaves pushed through the surface and held their faces up to be kissed by the genial sun. Then bright crocuses began to spangle the turf and a daffodil sprang out like a star in the canopy of night, against the bleak barrenness of the soil.

In spite of the disintegration in the artificial affairs of men, though nations were parting in discord, and new and evanescent principalities being constructed, yet nature held her calm sway uninterruptedly, and season followed season, flowers bloomed and grass sprang anew, as in the past, governed by the great unchangeableness of the laws of the universe, and the sun rose and set over each new day.

The balmy winds of April toyed with the feathery bloom of maple and ash and flung the branches of the oak, throbbing with renewed life, far and wide against the rain-washed skies. The farmyard was vibrant with the wakened energies of spirit, all the air redolent with the freshness of newly turned earth. The waters leaped and sparkled gladly on their passage to a larger stream or pond, irrigating as they went the fertile fields through which they passed. Everywhere were heard the busy sounds of farm life. Even the cattle seemed glad to refresh themselves on tender buds and grass after their long confinement, and stood and sniffed the fragrant atmosphere exultantly.

They were busy days at the Marsh farm. Abel Marsh, though not exacting, was energetic and expected every man in his employ to do his duty. There were no loiterers in his family. From the first flash of sunlight to its last expiring quiver he led his men across fields and through meadows, planting and sowing the enormous crops he would later harvest. He depended on nature and he knew she would not fail him.

Then, one Monday morning, bright and early, they started out down to the level lot behind the house and barn, to plough and furrow the moist earth. In the midst of the "hawing" and "geeing" to the unwieldy oxen they used, the long blast of the horn was heard from the direction of the house.

"You're wanted, Eph. Pretty likely Sary wants some help with the washin'. Hurry back."

Abel Marsh took the long goad from Ephraim's hand and started on the steady tramp after the oxen. Ephraim rolled down the legs of his trousers, drew his cap over his eyes, and started off to the house, whistling.

Steadily, row after row, the damp black earth was rolled up and turned over by the great strength of the patient oxen, guided by their master, man. The rank, rich smell of the loam was taken up by the wind and blown hither and thither, to mingle with the scent of tender buds and tiny blossoms hidden away in the woodland. Phil, who was holding the plow, threw off his hat, an old straw one, and let the wind blow wildly through his hair. He was a child of nature and enjoyed her every mood.

"Hello!" he said, suddenly, and his hands dropped from the plow handles, "here comes Eph back, father, and he's running. Hasn't been gone

five minutes either. What do you suppose is the matter?"

"Blest if I know."

Abel Marsh paused, goad lifted in air, to regard the fleeing figure of Ephraim. Just then, in his eager excitement, he stumbled over a little hillock, and came sprawling down hill, ploughing with both arms in the newly turned soil.

"Hello! Pick yourself up. What an awkward cuss you are, to be sure, Eph. What's the matter now?"

Phil was laughing heartily, leaning against the fence.

Ephraim picked himself up ruefully.

"You wait," he gasped, "till I tell you what I come for. Mis' Marsh blowed for some of us to come up — 'cause a man has just gone by, from the city — an' he stopped for a drink o' water, an' tol' her the news."

"What news? Out with it."

Abel Marsh leaned forward interestedly.

"Why — why — Fort Sumter has fell — an' — an' — thar's agoin' to be a war, he says."

CHAPTER XI

THE storm had burst. Not suddenly, without warning, but presaged by ominous mutterings and terrible gathering of clouds. Hoping against hope, many had declared the skies would yet clear and the thunders of awakened human passions die away. But it was not so. The sharp lightnings of hatred and vindictive feeling rent the clouds asunder, only to reveal, behind them, the dark masses of tempest pillars, piled up and covering all the blue from short-sighted mortals.

The sun always shines, but we do not always see it; and the hardest thing in the world is to face the truth fearlessly.

Thundering along the marts of the busy city street, ringing down to the very doors of the humblest home in all the broad land, came the call from the nation's head for seventy-five thousand men; and wherever beat a manly heart the summons came with a personal force as if the finger had been pointed and a voice had called peremptorily, "You!"

All Woodley heard the voice, the cry of a nation to her sons for succor, with mingled feelings. Through all the settlers of the sturdy old town, many of whom could boast of lineal descent from the old colony, ran the dominant sentiment of patriotism. In the early morning breeze floated Old Glory proudly, its folds caught and flung against the mellowing skies of spring, and from many of the dwellings, all along the yellow, dusty highway, the stars and stripes were flung. Solomon Penny sent to town for a great sup-

ply of patriotic bunting and screamed himself hoarse with advice and pungent comment on the situation. John Dale snapped his whip thoughtfully against his boot and remained silent, an unusual thing for him.

Around the square wood-stove, fireless now, in the corner of the little store, groups of men gathered talking hotly, earnestly, and interestedly. Never before, within their memory, had there been cause for such commotion of kindred spirits on a common topic.

The next day after the announcement of the fall of Sumter a fife and drum corps from the neighboring city walked ankle deep in the dust of the principal thoroughfare, and a recruiting office was established in the little white schoolhouse on the brow of the hill. It seemed strange to see a soldier in uniform seated in John Sherburne's desk, and Solon Wiseman crept in at the door, gave one swift glance, and then ran breathlessly back to the little store.

"I seen him! I seen him!" he gasped. "I s'pose now we sh'll all hev to go," and he trembled apprehensively.

"I reckon they won't want you," observed Eli Abbot dryly, with a contemptuous glance at the spare proportions of the unfortunate.

"Cost the gov'nment too darned much to feed yer," croaked Solomon Penny, who anticipated increased custom from the proximity of the soldiers and was correspondingly elated, though he endeavored to temper his exhilaration by a subdued sense of the gravity of the situation.

And a few days afterward, Ephraim Binks climbed the hill and, stumbling into the little schoolhouse, registered his name as a volunteer and went to drilling with the "awkward squad." He had dropped the plow in the middle of a furrow, drawn

one rugged hand across his forehead and looking over to Phil, muttered brokenly, "I can't stand this, Phil. I can't stand it," and rushed away toward the house.

"Where you going, Eph?" called out Phil after him.

"Goin' to enlist."

He turned back to look into Phil's face an instant, and there was a sob in his voice. "I've laid awake nights, Phil, an' it keeps ringin' in my ears when I'm workin'. I know it's mean to quit now, when there's all the plantin' to do, but I've got to go. Somethin' keeps callin' me — I don't know what it is, but it's stronger'n I am, — an' — I'm goin'."

Again he drew the back of his brawny hand across his eyes, as if to brush away some haunting vision, and then hurried out of sight behind the broad side of the barn.

After it was done "for good an' all," as he expressed it, he was calmer. He came back down to the farmhouse at night, opened the door, and stepped into the kitchen. Mrs. Marsh and 'Scilla were clearing away the remains of the supper, and for a moment he regarded them wistfully by the light of the dim lamp on the shelf. Then he burst out, "I've 'listed, Mis' Marsh. 'Scilla, I'm goin' to war."

"I knew you had, Ephrum."

Sarah Marsh pushed her spectacles up on her forehead with a puzzled gesture. "What did you do it for — jest when we was plantin', too, an' needed you?"

"I dunno." He hesitated irresolutely, then continued, "I jest had to. It's ben follerin' me this long while, this feelin' — ever sense there was any talk o' havin' trouble — an' it jest seemed to me ez if there

was someone sayin' in my ear all the time, 'ef they do fight, you go, Ephrum, you go—it means you,' an' when the time come, I jest had to." He looked at 'Scilla helplessly. Sarah Marsh turned in the doorway, where she was standing with a dish in her hand, and regarded him kindly.

"Wal, Ephrum," she said, slowly, "ef you had to, I s'pose you did, an' we sh'll git along someway, without you. I only hope Phil an' Francis won't think they've got to go," and she disappeared into the darkness of the sitting-room beyond.

'Scilla still washed dishes at the sink, only now she was humming some little air under her breath. Ephraim advanced a few steps into the room and presently stood beside her.

"'Scilla," he said, humbly, but she continued singing, and did not notice him at all.

"'Scilla," he repeated, coaxingly.

"Well, what?" she snapped, sharply.

"You heard. I'm goin' to war," brokenly.

"Well, what of it?" she rattled the dishes loudly and went on singing.

"Oh, nothin'! only I thought I'd come an' say good-bye. There's a lot o' danger, you know, of my being killed, an' I thought—mebbe—you an' me had better part friends."

"'Tain't likely you'll see much fightin'." She lifted her hands from the dishwater and dried them on one corner of her apron. "Mis' Marsh says there won't be any. But of course," graciously, "'s long's you're goin' away, I'm willin' to be friends," and she gave him one of her warm and reddened hands.

He squeezed it tightly before he released it.

"I don't s'pose, 'Scilla, there's any use o' my sayin' what I tried to a long time ago—of askin' you ef you'll marry me, when I come home?"

"I guess you ain't much afeard o' fightin' much," she sneered, contemptuously, "you're so mighty sure you'll come home. No, I ain't agoin' to marry you, Ephrum Binks, nor promise to neither—if you do come home. I'm sure I hope you'll come home, though."

Ephraim turned away dejectedly.

"It would of comforted me lots, 'Scilla," he said, "an' I shall be almighty homesick. I wish you could of said it," he finished, pleadingly.

"Well, I couldn't," and she turned to her work again.

"I know why, of course," Ephraim interjected, stolidly. She tossed her head saucily and made no reply.

"Well, good-bye, 'Scilla. I'm goin' upstairs to git a few things o' mine I want to carry, an' I want to see Phil. When you see me agin you won't know me. I sh'll hev on my uniform." He smiled proudly as a sense of his dignity as a soldier of the Union came over him.

"I hope you'll like it. That's all I've got to say," and 'Scilla wrung a harsh towel dry between her strong hands.

All over Woodley Centre, here and there, volunteers came straggling in, young men in whose hearts the voice of duty and love of country was as strong as in the untutored soul of Ephraim Binks. Freely they laid their young lives on the altar of their country's need, content to have returned to them, when their services were no longer required, whatever remnant of that life could not be utilized in the cause; or to yield it up for the immortal crown they felt sure would await them if they were hurled into eternity from some battlefield.

In the quiet confines of his school, Francis Marsh endeavored to stifle the voices that called him loudly even as they had called to Ephraim, and bade him leave everything that made life for him worth living, and, turning his back on them all, follow the flag to death if need be. There was his mother. He knew she would oppose, with almost superhuman influence, any mention by him of an enlistment. She would urge the delicacy of his constitution, apparent from early childhood, and which unfitted him for the hardships of the march and the battlefield; the advancing years of his father and herself, and the duty he owed them to continue his studies, marry, and settle down to be the prop and comfort of their declining years; and the fact that he was their younger son.

He felt sure that she would spare Phil first and more easily, if one of them must go. And then, she would not hear of the interruption of his most cherished ambition, the relinquishment of all the dreams and plans in which they had both indulged, for this. Yet, stronger than all her objections, stronger than the love he bore the delicate girl who had promised to be his wife, stronger than the mother love or the filial devotion he had given her, outweighing his plans, his ambition, his triumphs even, was the voice of duty and love of country. He must go.

He tried to study harder; but he could hear the steady tramp, tramp of the marching thousands, mustering to the country's defense, and his eyes turned from his book introspectively to his own conscience, to ask himself the stern question, "Why do you not go? Your country needs you, and when she called she meant, not others, but you!"

He talked with Margaret. She put her hands, soft, white, clinging hands, on both his shoulders,

and pleaded, prayed that he would not go. But above the sweetness of her persuasive voice, over the softly clinging hands, a stern voice, a strong arm, urged him to the field of strife. He let the first call pass, though he chafed inwardly. But when the second came, imperative, sharp with the pain of those who suffered because he was not there, he put aside the clinging arms that would have held him fast, kissed the gentle, pleading lips, looked down into the fathomless eyes, wherein lay the depths of her love for him, and said, "I must go, Margaret, dearest. I should be less than a man if I could hear that call again, unheeding. If it is God's will, I shall return — we will always hope for that."

"But Francis," still she implored him, "there are others, so many. Surely there is no need for you to go."

"There are more who have as much to leave, as much to surrender, as I. I am a man. Therefore it is my duty to go."

He went down to the old home, and in a long talk with his mother made known his plans.

"I should of thought," she answered him, slowly, "thet if either of my boys was goin' it would of been Phil's place to go."

"We must all answer these questions for ourselves," he assured her, "perhaps the call has not come to Phil, strongly as it has to me. Phil is more sensible than I. He is not so impulsive. He is a dear, good fellow, and I know I can leave you safely in his care."

"D'you think you'll be able to stand it, Francis — all the marchin' an' the fightin' an' the layin' out on the ground? You know you ain't over strong," anxiously.

"Oh, that will be all right," cheerily, "you always coddled me too much."

She said no more, but silently, patiently, went about getting his clothes in condition and making every preparation she could think of for his comfort and well being. It was like spilling her heart's blood to take this son from her, but she could give him up and she did, though she was fully convinced that should a bullet find his heart, her own would break at that very instant.

Once having cast the die, he was all enthusiasm and hopefulness. Margaret came down to the old place to be with him to the last, bringing with her the intangible barrier she had set up between herself and his people, especially his mother.

One day in early June, when the air was full of the scent of budding flowers and sweet with the rain-washed fragrance of an earth refreshed with showers, he walked alone down the sandy, sinuous road, lush with juicy grass on either side, and halted at the gate of Hope's home.

She was standing in the yard, tying up a rosebush that clambered over the door.

"May I assist you?"

She turned, and a deep flush overspread her cheeks. The dark tinted masses of her soft hair were truly sun-kissed now, since she was bareheaded and little glints of sun from the blue skies sparkled in her eyes. The mobile mouth had taken on a pensive curve of sadness lately, which accentuated its intellectual characteristics and intensified the expression of the face. A soft gown of lilac muslin, sprigged with lightly tossed sprays and tiny blossoms, floated about her like foam, in billowy folds. There was a suggestion of voluminousness to its outlines, like the infolding leaves that

wrap the heart of a rose; and her white neck rose, column-like, but throbbing with quickened life, from the low-turned collar of frosty lace confined with the massive cameo she always wore.

Recovering herself, she turned and held out her hand to him.

"Come, let us sit down, where it is shady. See, I have tied the rose. It is secure," and she led the way to an arbor of latticed vines, and sinking into one seat, motioned him to an opposite one.

"I have come, Hope," he said, simply, "to tell you that I am going to enlist. I am going to war."

She answered him quite as simply as he had spoken.

"Your mother told me something of your decision. I am sorry," she lifted her eyes to his face, "and I am proud."

"Thank you." He bowed gracefully. "I knew you would approve—that you would sympathize, you would understand, Hope," gratefully, "not all, even our dearest friends, do that."

"If I were a man," her eyes glowed with enthusiasm, "I should go, too."

"I am sure you would."

"Failing in that, I am going to do the next best thing—stay at home, and make, what do you call them?—Havelocks for the soldiers."

"An impracticable sort of an adjunct to our head-covering," he said, playfully, "but I am sure there will be things you women—our sisters—will make, and send to us, that will keep us in mind of the old home and its comforts, and make the privations easier to bear. I have come to say good-bye, Hope—if I do not see you again alone, and to ask you to take a daughter's place with my mother. Fill my place,

Hope—you can do it as no one else can—and try to make her feel my loss a little less.”

He was standing now, with one hand on the vines, their glossy leaves shading his face. “Be good to her, Hope—for my sake. Go to see her often—don’t let her get lonesome, and miss me. I know it is a good deal to ask—from me—to you. Don’t think, dear sister, that I do not appreciate what you have already sacrificed for us, but I know your kindly nature as few have been privileged to, and I am sure of your loyalty. Please, Hope, for my sake, promise me. If you forsake her, she will be very lonely.”

She rose from her seat, and stood beside him.

“I think you may be sure,” she said, “that I shall do all I can for your mother. I shall miss you, too, Francis, we have been friends so long. But—” brokenly, “I am glad you are going—and I am very proud of you.”

“God bless you, Hope,” and then, before she realized, he had thrown his arms around her and pressed his lips to hers.

“Oh, no—you must not.” She drew herself away from him quickly.

“It is hard to break old ties,” he cried, and there was a new light in his eyes, a new note in his voice. Then suddenly the vision of another face rose mockingly before him, and he knew that he had forgotten himself. “Forgive me, Hope. Good-bye. Good-bye,” and with one look into her eyes, he was gone. And she—with all the old love, which was not dead, throbbing in her veins, wakened by his kiss, she walked slowly to the house, brushing the rose leaves as she passed.

CHAPTER XII.

ONLY those mothers who gave sons at the urgent call of their country's need, can appreciate what Sarah Marsh suffered as she saw her son march away with the boys in blue. Outwardly calm, she attended to all those details which are a mother's prerogative, and hers was the steadiest voice that bade him Godspeed one bright summer morning, hers the unfaltering eye that watched until they faded into mere specks in the distance, the soldiers who were all the sons of old neighbors and friends of hers. It seemed so strange to see them, boys she had known, some of them, since birth, many of whom she had helped to nurse through the ailments of childhood; for she was "Aunt Sarah" to the whole neighborhood, — marching in serried ranks with grim, determined faces, to an unknown fate.

And Francis, her Francis, the son in whom all her pride was centered, he for whom she had labored, thought and saved, could it be true that she had made this supreme sacrifice for her country's good?

All the events of the past few weeks seemed like a dream to her, as she returned to the house where Margaret lay in the darkened parlor bedroom, weeping for her own shattered hopes.

Hope met her at the door with shining eyes, went with her into the sitting-room, and, pushing her gently into a chair, stood by her side and softly combed and smoothed the dark hair into whose strands were braided so many threads of gray, talking meanwhile, in low

tones, of him who had gone, hopefully, admiringly, dwelling always on the happy future days when he should return.

Margaret returned to her home in a few days, and life went on as usual at the Marsh Farm, in spite of its depleted family. Phil was now the sole dependence of his father, who seemed to cling to him with increased tenderness in his bluff way, now that they were so much alone.

Time would have passed rather dully but for Hope. She made the house her second home, and there she gathered about her all the young girls of her acquaintance and worked for the soldiers. There was hardly a girl in the village but had been called upon to part with either sweetheart or brother, and their enthusiasm was unanimous when Hope suggested that they should furnish home comforts as far as possible, to the absent ones. Doubtless a good deal of their energy was misdirected, as many of the carefully prepared dainties sent were found at their destination to consist of a heterogeneous mass which was fit only for instant disposal; but there were many things fashioned by deft fingers, lint, rolled bandages, packages of paper and envelopes, stamps, little cases filled with needles, thread, buttons, and court plaster that were worth more than their weight in gold to the homesick boys in the far-away Southern camps.

Sarah Marsh gave the young girl free use of her capacious home; and because it was Francis' mother, and she was doing these things for him and his comrades, Hope took advantage of her generosity in this respect, and filled the house with all the young people she could collect, organized them into a band of workers, directed their busy fingers, and rewarded their industry with a bounteous tea, which she had assisted

mother Marsh to prepare, earlier in the day. Such of the young men as still remained at home were bidden to the feast, and then there were games and jollity until long past the conventional bedtime for the rural population.

Phil Marsh always walked home with Hope after these gatherings, and one night, it was a night rank with the perfumed dews that fell from heaven to the flowers, he broached the subject nearest his heart to her. They had been walking along under the stars, by the side of the road, ankle-deep in the lush grasses, listening to but not heeding the harmonious sounds of the under world, those tiny vibrations of the strings of the harp of nature that make the perfect chord, each busy with introspective thoughts, when suddenly Phil's voice cut the vibrant silence.

"Hope," he said, earnestly, "it seems to me that in the past months you have been awakening from the dream that held you fast for so long. You are more reconciled to my brother's voluntary dividing of the ties between himself and you, and I have taken heart, because, Hope, I have fancied that you have seemed kinder to me than usual. Now, I am not sufficiently conceited to imagine you care for me, in the way I do for you—that you love me now,—perhaps you never could, but I would be satisfied with only a part of your affections, dear. You might still be my mother's daughter, if you would. You may have all my heart, for only half—one little half of yours."

He laughed a little hopeful laugh, and the sound of it smote her heart like a blow. She stood quite still, under the starlight. The wind caught a loose tendril of her deep-tinted hair and blew it into Phil's eyes. He caught it lightly, kissed it and returned it to her.

"Phil Marsh!"

Her voice was cold and bitter.

"You promised me that you would never—that you would always—be my friend, and never, no, never, say to me words like what you have just uttered. You may taunt me, because he—Francis—your brother, cast me off—because he no longer loved me—perhaps he never cared," there was a little catch in her voice as she hurried on, "as I did. You think I have forgotten,—that already I have turned from him to you! Let me tell you this—I have always loved him—I always shall! Though I am not worthy of any part of his love, though I am honored that he is still my friend, I can never forget the one real affection of my lifetime. There is no heroism in you. You would be content with part of a woman's affection, where he must have perfect love or nothing! Your love would not satisfy me, and I have none—," she threw out her hands, "none at all to give you. And then, for you may as well know the truth," her voice dropped to a lower tone from the very intensity of its passion, "you have no hero blood in your veins. You are good to them, kind to me—but you are too content. The humdrum is too strong an element in you. The man I love, I must first admire."

She moved along by his side, crushing at every step some tender form of plant or insect life.

"What do you mean?"

The words came slowly, wonderingly, as if he had just awakened to a realization of her bitter condemnation.

"Why do you not go to war? You are young, strong, vigorous, trained to an outdoor life. The intellectual part of your education has not been neglect-

ed either, you understand the causes that led to this great strife. Oh, Phil, Phil,—” agonizedly, “does not your heart burn to be one to right your country’s wrongs? Would you not rather wipe out her injuries with your own warm blood than to live in listless apathy—content?”

She laughed mirthlessly.

He looked down into her face and the pained look grew and widened in his eyes.

“Why, no, Hope, I have never thought of it in that light before, I felt that my duty was here, with my parents. One son is surely enough to give to one’s country, and besides, they needed me.”

“Did Francis ask,” her eyes shone and scintillated, reflecting the starshine in their fathomless depths, “did he care for questions like that? Oh, you—you are so cool, so calculating, in all things! His first thought was for his country and her needs, and,” proudly, “he gave up everything—everything—for her. I can find it in my heart to worship such heroism. He will go into battle fearlessly, gladly, and if he falls—I shall be glad for him—for myself.”

“I see.”

Poor Phil groped along blindly after the rapid flight of her imagination.

“You think, perhaps, Hope, that I have not sufficient courage—that I am not brave enough to go to war. Do you think I am afraid?” There was a little trace of resentment in his voice now.

“Oh, no, it is not that, Phil,” for she saw that she had wounded him, “but you have not the high sense of valor that it requires to make such a sacrifice. You cannot see the need. He felt it, he did not have to see.”

"I am sorry—I asked you what I did," slowly, "I should have known better. If I were not, as you say, stupid, I should know that no part of your affections can ever belong to me. I am not calculated to inspire a lasting love. I have not the power. But, God knows, Hope, I can love you truly, devotedly, patiently, and that I shall always do. I am not enthusiastic, like Francis. He acts on impulse. I am apt to weigh my decisions and count the cost,—beforehand. I am afraid—there is not the making of a hero in me. I should fail miserably if I tried."

"You would wait, and consider, and turn the subject this way and that. There is, or should be, something in the heart of every man—it is in the hearts of some women—that responds instantaneously to the call of patriotism. Love of country should come before everything—everything, I say. There is nothing, nothing, that should stand in the way of the rush to arms, of the patriotic."

"If I had your enthusiasm," he assented, "I should rouse everyone to instant action. I am sorry I have not filled the requirements of your ideal. But we are all made, just as we are, and, somehow, we find our level—and sink to it."

He spoke despondently.

"Your level is not one to sink to," the girl's earnest voice rose above the voices of the night, "you have been content to drift. You love your home, your flocks, your work, your friends. In times of peace, you are the model citizen, but in troublous times, times like these, days that try the stoutest hearts, we need men of impulse, men who do not pause to consider or ask themselves questions, but who, when their country calls their name, as she has

the name of every able-bodied young man, will answer instantly, "Here!"

"And that was why you could not care for me, as I wished?"

"No. You should know a woman's heart is not thrown aside to be bestowed on the next comer, in a few months. To me, love is a sacred emotion. It is something more than good judgment, or a desire to please one's friends, that prompts a true woman to place her heart in the keeping of a man. When your brother sought my affection, I gave it to him because it was honestly his, and his it will remain as long as I live. Because," there was real pain in her voice, "he was mistaken, because his own heart belonged elsewhere, it has made no change in my sentiment, where change is impossible. Phil," solemnly, "I like you, I respect you. If you were my brother, I should love you. If my words have seemed harsh, it is because I have no brother to give to my country, and I have tried to urge you, because, in a sense, you are very dear to me, as all your family are, to give yourself, heart and soul, to this cause, as I would if I were a man, as your brother has, as I believe all true men will do. I should not like—" she lowered her head, avoiding his gaze, "to have you wait until the draft made it impossible for you to evade the issue for then—" hesitatingly, "I should be ashamed of you."

They were standing now before the gate of her home. The moon had parted the clouds and was shining on the drooping rose-bush just inside the gate. Its deeply-tinted crimson blossoms, their hearts bespangled with diamond dewdrops, were drenched in the mystic light and yielded up to the caressing sweetness of the whispering winds the sub-

the perfume of their breath, which floated out and out, on waves of shimmering light. The moonbeams fell over the face of the girl and dipped deeply in the mirroring pools that lay, translucent, within her eyes.

Phil Marsh looked once, longingly, at the lovely picture, and sighed. It was so hard to give her up.

"Do you think," he said, and his voice was very grave, "that if I were to go and fight, and distinguish myself, if I were very brave and impulsive, as you would have me, that you would like me better?"

"I like you now." She turned to him impulsively. "I have always liked you, Phil. And, yes, Phil," she put out one hand with a little sudden movement, "if you were to go to battle, and should do some very brave thing, such things as we read of every day, I am sure — yes, I am sure, I should like you better!"

He clasped her hand, and, bowing low, raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"That shall be my inspiration, then," he cried, "and whenever I am about to turn back, or my courage fails me, your name shall spur me on, and we shall win."

"I am sure you are very brave, Phil," she faltered, with downcast eyes.

"Not brave, but — hopeful," he amended, smilingly, "and never, never, Hope, whatever I do in the future months, think that it was I who did it. It is your spirit, your ringing words, that will spur me on; and I feel sure, with such an inspiration, even I, contented Phil, as you called me just now, may be able to do something worthy of a soldier of my country."

He turned before she could answer him, and strode away, down the long highway, ankle-deep in the

yellow sand, his head bowed and the moonlight shining on the stern lines of his face. He was hurt, wounded sorely, by the hand he loved, and while he walked, dark thoughts rushed through his brain. His heart swelled, hot with resentment, that she, of all women, should so misjudge him. It hurt him cruelly. He had tried so hard to be the faithful, devoted son and brother, tried to fill the place Francis had impulsively made vacant, without a questioning thought, had put aside all his own dreams, ambitious, patriotic, for them, for her, and she — she had covertly, if not openly, accused him of cowardice. She did not want him to wait until the draft made it out of the question for him to defer going. Well, he would not wait.

He tramped along miserably until the shadow of home loomed into view across the road at his feet. He went round the corner of the house and stood quite still a moment, to drink a draught of the peace in the heavily scented air.

As he stood there, in the silence, sensing nature's beauties but heedless of them because of the misery of his own heart, the sound of sobbing smote his ear. He looked around. There, crouched on the low doorstone, was 'Scilla crying as if her heart would break. He went over to her and placed one hand on her shoulder.

"What's the matter, now, 'Scilla?" he asked, quietly. For answer, she put a crumpled paper into his hand.

"Read that, Phil, read that," she said, tragically, between her sobs.

"I don't think I can," he said, "the shadows are so dark out here."

"Come into the kitchen. They're all abed. I'll git a light."

He followed her into the kitchen, where she produced a lamp and set it on the table. By its dim light he made out its contents.

"Dear Priscilla," he read, "when you receive this, I shall be far away, probably never to return. I am going to Canada, to escape the infernal draft. I was not in sympathy with the cause, which will be a lost cause in less than a year, and I am not going to risk my precious neck or be a target for bullets from men I am in complete accord with, as far as my principles go. If ever you do hear from me again, it will probably be that I have distinguished myself on a Southern battlefield—fighting on the right side. At present, Canada is good enough for me. There are plenty of singing schools to teach there—plenty of good times, and plenty of pretty girls. Goodbye. R. H. Hemilstross."

Phil laid down the sheet with a sniff of disgust. He thought he saw a chance for a much-needed word of advice.

"Scilla," he said, calmly, "I see no cause for regret for what you have lost. A traitor to his country, false to everything he has said to you, to all the promises he has made, I think that you and the community at large are well rid of the rascal. But—" and his voice sounded preternaturally stern and solemn to the trembling girl, "there is an honest fellow, far away tonight, in what danger, enduring what privations, we do not know, who is well worth the tears you have been shedding for that—" he cast about for a word, and found two, "that cowardly cur. Better quit crying and go to bed: Good-night,"

“Good-night, Phil.”

She answered him more gently than was her wont, and there was a new light in her eyes, when, presently, she took up the lamp and followed him up the narrow staircase.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE was another young man in Woodley Centre to whom the important questions that now agitated all the civilized world, to a greater or less degree, appealed powerfully, and who stood, as it were, between two fires, facing the crossroads of indecision. This was John Sherburne.

He could trace his descent straight from old Plymouth colony, and he had inherited all their reserve and conservatism, as well as a good deal of their deliberative propensities. Now, in those days, when the tossing waves urged the creaking vessel up to the barren shores of Plymouth, bluff and rocky, whose dark-limbed trees threw their long branches high against the pallid wintry skies, it would do to deliberate, to take time. But, as the country progressed, more haste, quicker decisions became an absolute necessity, and it seemed strange to see a youth still in the sunshine of the early twenties, hesitate over what he knew to be his duty as well as his inclination.

When the first call for troops had sounded through the land, and hosts of men had hurried to enlist for the required three months, which had seemed then to be the limit of the requirement of their service, he had longed for the impulsiveness, the hot-headed haste which had thrust Ephraim Binks into the front ranks of the volunteers. But it was not his. He could never do anything that way. He must first sit down, weigh the matter carefully and sometimes

agonizedly, before he could decide as to the best course to pursue.

When Francis Marsh hastened home from school, urged by the impelling sense of duty, and cheerfully took up the unaccustomed service which would remove him far from home and friends, he, John Sherburne, longed to clasp his friend's hand and say, "I will go, too. I want to be with you." But he was silent when the time came, the old habit of reserve whispered more loudly than patriotism or duty or enthusiasm, "Not yet. Not yet," and he obeyed.

Now Phil Marsh, than whom there was no one dearer to him or more congenial among all the young men of Woodley, had followed in the footsteps of those who blazed the way to glory, and the same strong desire oppressed him to go. Yet, he shook hands quietly with Phil, wished him Godspeed and a safe return, and let him go — alone.

Now, when they were all gone, and the home of his dearest friends left desolate, he sat himself down to think.

He was possessed of a sturdy inherited intellect and a vivid imagination. Day after day news was brought him of defeat and disaster, and night after night, it seemed to him, that a great commanding shape stood there in the darkness, by his bedside, pointing the finger of silent accusation at him and murmuring, "You! You! Will you let the cause die and go down in shame because of your weakness, your indecision? If all were like you, then might your country blush for the hesitation of her laggard sons."

He knew it was his great fault mocking him, and his thoughts ran in a deeper channel still.

And out of all the chaos, from the vortex of his tumultuous imaginings, came forth one day, in late summer, when the velvet bee hung lazily above the heart of the fairest flowers, when insects droned away the hours beneath a sky of molten gold, an expression of content and decision dwelt in his calm eyes, making new lines in the gravity of his face.

And he took the narrow road, just at dusk one evening, that led down through fields on either side of waving corn, and wheat wherein the poppies grew, to the very door of the woman he loved. There was no hesitation in his manner now. The die was cast, and the true manliness of his nature seemed thrown about his personality like a garment of finest texture and wondrous fit, ennobling all his attributes which had hitherto seemed so commonplace.

He caught the flutter of a voluminous white gown, diaphanous and floating, among the gathering shadows, and his footsteps turned in the direction where he had seen it.

"Miss Grahame," he called softly, and she turned her face to him. There was a little light left in the western heavens, and its soft, rosy radiance, evanescent as the fading day, touched her features gently. He read her secret in her eyes, he had often read it here before, for she, knowing the austerity of his nature, had never dreamed of crediting him with much penetration in affairs of the heart, and had therefore been careless about concealing her feelings.

He turned and walked by her side down the broad lane that led to the daisy-spangled meadows, and there, leaning on the bars of the old meadow gate, she watched the sunset die away from the western skies, while he gazed at her till its tender flush faded

quite away from her face, its reflection left her eyes, and soft, misty shadows of gray enfolded her like a swirling garment.

They talked of things indifferent for a while. Then, gradually, he led the conversation around to himself, his aims, his hopes, subjects hitherto locked in the secret places of his own heart. One after another, he unfolded to her his dearest ambitions, and she listened, sympathetic, with throbbing heart and glistening eyes.

"Doubtless you think, or have thought," he said, finally, "that I lacked courage, patriotism, when all about me—all my friends and neighbors, were leaving home for the seat of war. I have thought so, sometimes, myself. It has been hard for me, though, not to go, hard, sometimes, to think of going. But, finally, I have made my 'late repentance' and I am going."

She caught her breath with a little gasp. Then he was going out of her life, gravely, silently, as he had entered it, to be killed, perhaps, by some well-directed bullet from the enemy, and—he would never know. But he was speaking again, interrupting her passionate thought.

"I have been laggard in all else—as I was in patriotism," regretfully, "and at this late day—the eleventh hour—I have come to you, humbly, believe me, with a realizing sense of my just deserts, to place my fate in your hands. I have neither father nor mother, no brother or sister will mourn for me, if I should not come home. But I should like to feel that there is one—dearer to me than all these, if I have seemed at times indifferent, who will take a little interest in me, even though I may not be worthy of one of the least of her kind thoughts."

How like the man!

His grave little speech had fallen on a tenderly responsive heart and impulsively she moved a little closer to him, and he felt the motion of her soft draperies near his arm.

"I am sure," she faltered, "you have my regard, have always had it."

It seemed so tame beside the emotions that flooded her heart and rose to her eyes; but her tongue refused to voice the sentiments she felt.

"Thank you."

He laid one hand over hers on the top rail of the barred gate, and closed it over the trembling fingers as he spoke. "It is a great sacrifice I want to ask of you, one that I could not hope to command under other circumstances, but it seems to me that in these times we all do strange things, utter strange words. Will you marry me before I go away, in a very few days, and thus give me something to inspire me to deeds of bravery as well as an inducement for my return? It would comfort me greatly," he spoke more simply now, and earnestly, "to have your letters when I am in camp, and I should not be so lonely."

He was appealing to her womanly nature now, and the response exceeded even his suddenly acquired hopes.

"You know my secret," she said, and the friendly grayness of the twilight hour hid the strong emotions of her expressive face, "you have read it well. I am willing, ready, to do anything you ask. If the smallest thing that I can do or the greatest sacrifice of which I am capable, will bring you any comfort, I am ready and willing to do it. I would ask you to

stay," she turned and placed both hands impulsively on his shoulders, "but our country has need of men like you, strong, brave, generous, yet calm and thoughtful; and shall her women be less patriotic than her men? No, go, and God be with you."

Her eyes shone proudly, and her voice rang with martial spirit which, had she been a man, would have carried her into the very thickest of the fray. He stooped. He was inches taller than she, who measured only as high as his heart, and there, in the solemn twilight hour, exacted from the ruby lips that had uttered the sentiments that would inspire him to do his whole duty, the tribute of their perfect affection. And together, hand in hand, having at last arrived at a full and comprehensive understanding, they strolled home through the fragrant grasses, and under the benediction of the evening star.

The next week, to the unbounded surprise of the whole village, they were married, and John Sherburne left at once for his place in the great army of the Republic. Though the parting was hard, his heart beat high as he marched with his comrades, under the folds of the starry banner of his native land, and the heart of the girl-wife he had left behind was very glad with a strange new joy which seemed more at first than she could bear, it was so unusual and so entirely unexpected.

When the long, hot days of the summer sunned themselves on many a fertile slope and gradually drifted to the hazy, dreamy September weather, she assumed the place her husband had left vacant in the little white schoolhouse on the hill, and tried to carry on the work he had left unfinished.

Through the open window of the schoolroom she could see the little shop of Solomon Penny, with its door always open now, and on its storm-beaten door-stone the little group of elder men, whose many cares and infirmities forbade them to go with their sons or the sons of their neighbors.

One pleasant, dreamy day, when the little knot of men were all there, John Dale, with the inevitable whip, which he snapped ceaselessly now, Nathan Drake, methodical, careful of speech as ever, Eli Abbot, parsimonious, deploring every dollar spent in the great struggle, and on the outskirts, hovering hungrily about, Solon Wiseman, a trifle thinner, a little more anxious than usual, a soldier in blue came marching up the dusty road and to their very feet. He dropped both hands to his sides, and stood respectfully at attention.

"Don't ye know me, neighbors?" he asked, a trifle huskily.

Solomon Penny rose to his feet and grasped the new-comer's hand.

"Wal, Eph Binks, ef you hain't got back! By the etarnal, I never thought I'd see you agin. Howdy?"

"Howdy," and Ephraim wrung the extended hand energetically, "how's all the folks?"

"Hain't you bin down to Marshes?"

The little group of men rose simultaneously to its feet and crowded about him.

"No. Jest come. You see, my three months was up sometime in July, an' I was mustered out, but it takes some time to git home an' I done some knockin' round in the meantime. How be they all?" anxiously.

"Wal," John Dale snapped his whip viciously, "what's left on 'em is all right, I guess. They ain't no one to home but Abe Marsh an' Aunt Sarah an' 'Scilla Hickins, now." He laughed, a broad guffaw that caused the little schoolmistress in the near-by schoolhouse to turn her head. Solomon Penny nodded in her direction.

"You remember her, Eph?" he growled, in a husky whisper. "Wal, that's Laurie Grahame, that was—Laurie Sherburne that is. Sherburne, he's up an' gone, too. Both o' the Marsh boys went before him," and there was a funny little twinkle in Solomon's eye, "an' last but not least, Professor Hemilstrass,—he also ran."

This raised another hoarse laugh, as Ephraim inquired, eagerly, "where to? Not to war, I swan?"

"No. To Canedy. Lit out the fust draft that he see comin'. He couldn't stand that, nohow. This town suddintly become too drafty for him."

Eli Abbot chuckled as he delivered this masterpiece of wit, which it was his custom to deal out regularly to all new-comers, and sometimes repeated for fear his immediate contemporaries should fail to remember it.

"They'll be powerful glad to see you, Ephrum," Nathan Drake spoke in the little silence that followed, "down to the Marshes. I reckon it's been pretty lonesome for Aunt Sarah, with both the boys gone."

"Yes, an' 'Scilla, she'll be lookin' for ye, Eph." John Dale squinted one eye at Ephraim as he said this.

"Let her look." Ephraim returned his stare stolidly, and then continued: "P'raps you fellers think I hain't learned nothin' at all sense I've ben

gone, but, by gum, let me tell you — ” with emphasis, “ I’ve ben whar they take some o’ the nonsense out o’ anybody. ”

“ Seen any fightin’ ? ”

Solomon Wiseman edged a little nearer to make this remark.

“ Plenty of it. Ben right in the middle of lots of sharp tussles as you’d care to see. Some time I’ll tell you ’bout it — but I’m goin’ right along down now to Mis’ Marsh’s. But I’ll tell you one thing, ” he turned and faced the little group determinedly, “ ’tain’t all it’s ben cracked up to be. It’s all right to talk about — goin’ an’ to want ter go — I believe in it all right, — but I ain’t agoin’ agin. You kin all depend on that. I done my share, I guess. An’ I hev come home with a whole skin — an’ I ain’t agoin’ agin. ”

“ Thought you’ wouldn’t arter you’d hed one taste of it, ” Eli Abbot muttered, “ tain’t so mighty fine as it looks in the papers. ”

“ Wal, I’m off — goin’ back to work on the farm. Woodley’s good enough for me yet awhile, ” and with a cordial “ so long, ” Ephraim shouldered what little baggage had survived the fortunes of war, and trudged away down the narrow yellow highway to the Marsh Farm.

Sarah Marsh was out in the yard, trying to “ shoo ” the chickens back to their quarters in the henhouse on the hill, when he turned into the yard. A “ Shaker ” bonnet bound and trimmed with fine-checked brown gingham, covered her head, an apron of similar color encircled her slender figure, and the sleeves of her dark print dress were rolled up above the elbow, disclosing the spareness of her arms as

well as the dark, sunburned hue they had gradually acquired throughout the summer. She did not see Ephraim at first. But the sound of his voice made her start.

"Ant Sarah," and she turned quickly where she stood, to behold a soldier in blue. "Francis," and her hands went out expectantly.

"It's only me, Mis' Marsh," said Ephraim, humbly, "I've got back an' I want to go to work. How you gittin' along?"

"Is it you, Ephrum?"

She had regained her old self-possession, and turned a pair of quizzical eyes upon the sturdy form of the young man. "Wal, how did you like fightin'?"

"I like here better," returned Ephraim, sturdily.

"Then stay here," she said, "I don't suppose you see anythin' of either of my boys?" with a searching glance into his eyes.

"No, ma'am. You see, I was goin' about most of the time—my company done lots of skirmishin' an' we didn't see many of the new recruits. I'm glad I'm back, an' I'm agoin' to git my overalls on an' help with the harvestin' if you'll let me."

"It'll be all right." She waved him toward the house. "We hain't had no reglar hired man, they're hard to git now—an' with both o' the boys gone, 'twan't much use to hev much agoin'. Father's managed to git help about the lumber, an' the hayin',—fust one an' then another—so's to git along. Now you've come, we sh'll git along better."

Ephraim hurried into the house. In the doorway of the sink-room he met 'Scilla. Her hands were wet with dishwater, her face red and flushed with the heat of her work near the stove.

"Wal—why—Ephrum Binks—you here?" she stammered. He took one step forward, passing her where she stood.

"D'ye think I was goin' to be killed?" he asked her coolly, surveying her agitation calmly.

"Hev you come home for good, Ephrum?" she asked, tremulously, noting with satisfaction his improved appearance in the uniform he still wore.

"Shouldn't wonder," he replied. "I don't think I'll go back for anythin'—I know of. I ain't quite such a fool as I was before I went, neither," he concluded, tersely.

"I'm glad of that."

A spice of the girl's old sauciness sharpened her tongue at his nonchalant air.

"Should think you might be," and he passed along up the stairs to lay away the gorgeous uniform of blue and get into, "for good an' all," as he expressed it, his "overalls an' jumper agin." But he forbore to make any inquiries concerning the lover who had supplanted him in the girl's affections before he had gone away—to the war.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE is nothing in reality that is ever quite like the dreams of anticipation. Could the fiery-hearted young men who volunteered with such avidity for their country's service have had but the one vision of the battle-fields and hospitals, unburied dead, nameless and unremembered graves, and the limbless wrecks who were to wander thereafter, suffering, through life, they would have paused in face of the horror of it all. It is a wise hand that veils the future.

And planted deep, in the very root and fibre of a man's being, if he be indeed a true man, lie the dormant forces of patriotism and love of country's honor, ready to spring to life magically in an hour, to bud and burst forth into full bloom when the season of her need and his opportunity is at hand.

The peaceful, sheltered home, with its rural sights and sounds, is one thing, the hurly-burly and thunderous roar of the death-dealing missiles of the battlefield another and vastly different side of the question, and one scarcely taken into account at all, in the fervor of his enthusiasm. From the high ground of elevated sentiment, where he stands, he observes only the rewards of the hero, the crown of patriotism and the applause of the waiting multitude. All these gradually fade away in the glaring light of actual experience.

It was thus with Francis Marsh.

He had enlisted for a principle, sacrificed all that was dear to him for a sentiment, beautiful and soul-satisfying; but he was now face to face with the naked truth. He was still ready to fight, still prepared, if need be, to spill the last drop of his blood on the fragrant sod for his country, but he found the many discomforts and petty disappointments he was called to meet from day to day, much harder to bear than actual conflict. There was no excitement to this. He had been marched away from home one pleasant June morning, to a city some miles distant, where, with his comrades, he had gone into camp until the middle of July. Of course he realized that the time spent here, in the mastery of military tactics, and becoming used to the exigencies of outdoor life, was not wasted; but his impatient soul was eager for the great deeds he saw ahead, and it was his desire to be doing his share toward the success of the great cause for which he was enlisted.

Inactivity fretted him. And when, a little later, his regiment with a number of others, was started on its journey to Washington, he wrote home glowing letters on the patriotic paper with its red, white and blue border, which had been furnished him by the thoughtfulness of Margaret, sealed hers with a flag, — and a kiss — and sent it speeding hopefully back on its way to the heart he loved.

He expected, soon, to have something of more moment to write, he told her. Oh, these brave, impatient, loyal hearts, worthy sons of the great mother — Columbia! — many stilled in death beneath the sod, some still beating with the slow throbs of despair and ebbing life, but all, in the morning of their youth, going joyously forth into battle, right to the cannon's mouth, for her dear honor.

After their arrival at Washington, they went at once into camp, just outside the city, on an eminence that overlooked the Capitol, remaining here with one or two changes, during the rest of the summer and all the next winter. The days were monotonous. The regular routine of camp life ill fitted the martial spirit of the boyish heart of Francis Marsh, and the incessant repetition of these duties which he performed over and over again, wearied him far more than some harder service would have done. His recreations were few. He wrote letters regularly to the home folks, and found his finest enjoyment perusing those he received in return. From them he learned of the enlistment of Phil and of John Sherburne, the marriage of the latter and the unexpected return of Ephraim Binks to his old place on the farm. Somehow, it comforted him inexpressibly to learn that the faithful Ephraim was with his father and mother. He knew that their interests would be served constantly and that the sturdy strength of the young giant would all be employed in their behalf. So he breathed more freely on their account.

He read all the books he could buy or borrow, some of them works he would hardly have touched when he was at school, and from many of them he gained an insight into life with which he had hitherto been unfamiliar. Occasionally, he obtained leave of absence and went down the heights, to the city, whose bulwarks he had helped to form; and then, accompanied by a comrade, he would wander about for hours, attracted by strange sights and sounds. He had seen the President, tall, sinewy and muscular, both walking and on horseback, when, as he occasionally did, he rode out to the camp, and passed

down the long line of white tents, wearing usually a high hat, which gave him something of the appearance of a giant.

It was a liberal education to him, reared in the quiet of his native place, to see here the great aggregation of men of power, intellect, and acumen, and he gained from the motley mass of humanity gathered at the heart of the nation, an insight into the development of various types of character, which broadened and enlarged the scope of his own mentality to a considerable degree. Here, too, he came into contact close and intimate, with the class of people who had been virtually the cause of the great conflict,—the “contraband,” so-called.

One Sunday, happening to stroll by a building where the colored population were holding a meeting, he entered, with his inseparable companion, a young fellow who had been a classmate, though coming from another State.

The room was filled with the dark-hued brethren, most of whom were seated, though here and there one remained standing, and a few soldiers lounged about the doorways and on the back seats. Francis and his companion, whose name was Ford, stepped just inside and sat down on the end of the nearest seat to the door. The meeting had hardly commenced.

He looked about him curiously, impressed by the sea of black faces, all shining with some hidden source of satisfaction or some enthusiasm unknown to the outsider. There was a young fellow on the seat in front of them, a trifle intoxicated, and inclined to be talkative. Occasionally, one of the dusky audience would turn about in his direction and utter a warning “Hush!” lifting at the same time an

admonishing finger, which had, usually, the effect of quieting him for the time being.

To open the meeting, someone prayed, long and fervently, for freedom, for the "year o' jubilee," which they felt sure could not be long in coming, and finally, for "Marse Abe Lincoln," who was to bring all these desired results about. Then, one after another rose in his place, and continued in prayer or testimony, to "help the meetin' 'long," as they had been requested to do, remaining standing when they had finished, instead of reseating themselves. The room was lighted with a few smoky lamps which cast grisly shadows into the farthest corners, producing a weird scene, out of the dark faces, outstretched hands, and slightly swaying bodies of the exhorters. Finally, someone started to sing a hymn whose refrain, a minor and with a wailing note, reiterated throughout its whole length, was, "when I am troubled in mind." The singer repeated the words and their weirdly accompanying music again and again, swaying from side to side as he sang, and presently he was joined by other black swinging bodies, like so many ebony pendulums, singing and swaying in rhythmic motion to the steady drone of the refrain. Gradually, the swaying motion became a dance as the music changed and all rose as if with one accord, chanting with long-drawn intonations, some words whose burden was the "longin' to be free."

Then the soldier lad on the back seat essayed to join in the circling dance. But its widening ripples dizzied him, for he rose unsteadily to his feet, shouting inanely and out of all time, something about "wanting to be free— be free—". One of the colored brethren chanted in perfect time with the

rest—"oh, put him out—put that vile sinner out—" and the others, taking up the refrain and the words, responded in unison, "yes, we will, Brudder—yes, we will—longin' to be free—" and grasping the soldier by his arms, they forced him out of the room.

Shortly after, Francis and his companion, fatigued by the closeness of the atmosphere which was heavy with the emanations of the excited bodies of those present, rose and quietly quitted the place.

"They remind me of a great roomful of howling dervishes," said Ford, as he linked his arm in that of his friend and hurried him along.

"It will be a problem, won't it?" returned Francis, "to know what to do with them when they are all free?"

"I should think so. They can't mix with us, that's certain, without some regeneration."

"And yet," reflectively, "they were fully as sensible, sober, and inoffensive as the white fellow who disturbed them."

"More so," assented his friend, heartily, "there's no fool like a white fool, when the wine is in."

"And the wit is out," echoed Francis, with a short laugh.

Silently they went back to camp, to learn that a new regiment had arrived while they were absent. "From down your way," said one of the soldiers as Francis passed his tent.

And so it happened when he pulled aside the flap of his own tent and entered, he perceived his brother Phil seated by his table. It was an affecting meeting. But there was no prospect of the brothers being long together.

"We've been ordered to break camp tomorrow," Phil informed him, "we only stopped here to get our bearings, I fancy. I think we are bound for the seat of action."

"I wish, with all my heart, that I were," said Francis, regretfully, "but here, we have to take it about as it comes to us."

CHAPTER XV.

IT was early morning. A few birds twittered in their nests, turned over and went to sleep again. A strong breeze, blowing from the northwest, stirred the branches of the trees so that they emitted that soft, singing sound, so mournful to one who is alone in the night. Here and there a star glimmered faintly.

The gray light, just spreading itself up from the east, mute messenger of the rising sun, disclosed the moving forms of a great body of marching soldiers, while the steady tramp, tramp, of their feet made a rhythmic accompaniment to the lighter music of the morning. Occasionally, the long line halted. Then mounted officers galloped back along its length, uttering subdued commands, while they rounded up the stragglers in the rear.

Again, the steady line of march was taken up and the sinuous rank moved in and out of the devious windings of the roadway. Once they crossed a little wooden bridge, then the clatter of horse's hoofs, the patter of shoes on the weather-beaten boards, echoed weirdly among the mist-enshrouded trees by the roadside.

A wide streak of crimson light pushed itself up above the horizon's rim and the whole sky glowed faintly from its effulgence.

In front of a great field, surrounded by rising land and on one side, heavily wooded, the phalanx halted. After a few hastily eaten mouthfuls, a mere apology

for a breakfast, the weary soldiers went to work. Away off in the distance, on a slight eminence, could be seen the breastworks of the enemy, surmounted by the great guns which poked their black noses far out through the morning mists, menacingly. Not a soul stirred behind the monster mounds of earth. It was like a sleeping city, guarded by the grim accoutrements of warfare. The soldiers on this side, utilizing their present immunity from attack, on account of the distance that intervened, made ready for the battle, with little delay and a good deal of nonchalance.

It was to be Phil Marsh's first experience of the reality of war. He had been hurried through the simple preliminaries of his service, marched these weary miles in silence, and now, he, with the rest of his comrades, inexperienced as himself in the real requirements of a soldier's life, had been put face to face with the enemy, and were at this hour on the very verge of an engagement. There was little necessity for preparation. They were to storm the enemy's almost invincible position, if they could, and occupy it before yonder blood-red sun, now rising in the east, should fade away, above the field of carnage.

One by one, companies of men, in fresh new uniforms, only slightly dusty from the long marches of the night, wheeled silently into place. There was something weirdly awful in the dread inaction that hovered over the camp of the enemy. Not a sound could be heard, not a movement was visible. But of what was going on behind the ramparts none were ignorant.

When all was ready, and just as the first long lances of the approaching sunlight were gilding the distant city with brilliant floods of radiance, the

troops advanced into the field. At a rapid quickstep they moved, with the precision and alignment of a review, bands playing their most inspiring martial airs, and the soft, silken folds of Old Glory flung wide to the morning breezes. 'Twas an inspiring sight. The soft blue of the skies overhead reflected the blue of the uniformed troops beneath, and the sun flashed and glinted on a forest of bayonets and the shining decorations of the officers' rank.

On and on came the solid phalanx of blue, each flank wheeling up to unite with the centre, as if their only object were to show the perfection of their discipline, receive well-merited applause, break ranks and return home. But the grim faces, stern lines that had drawn themselves about beardless, boyish mouths and the steady, unfaltering light in the eyes that faced the stronghold of the enemy told another story.

Then little flames began spitting from the rifles of the skirmishers, a mere flash in the pan, but promising better things, and announcing that already the battle had begun. And the long lines moved steadily upward, onward, not halting at all, preceded by the little jets of flame which now and then had begun to receive reply from the foe.

Away off in the distance, at the very confines of the field, still other troops were waiting, in readiness, until their services should be required.

As they marched steadily up to what might be certain death for him, Phil Marsh's mouth curved into a graven smile. He was wondering what Hope would say if she could behold this battlefield, these fierce, determined men, bent on the slaughter of other men, their brothers, face these bristling guns, go with

him, steadily, steadily, up that perilous height, and pour volley after volley at the ranks of the enemy until his own arm dropped powerless at his side. Would she stand there, unshrinking, while friend and comrade dropped, spilling their life blood as they fell, on the very ground at her feet? Could she see these sickening sights, hear these awful sounds, that were waiting in the stillness of the fragrant air, for him, would she be so enthusiastic, he wondered?

Her face would go before him into battle, and the remembered ring of her voice urging him to this, would nerve his arm to every action; but he felt that it was impossible for her to realize to what she had sent him. The voice of his captain, uttering stern commands, brought back his wavering attention and he pushed forward with the rest, step by step.

Presently, the breastworks before them were alive with human figures, clambering here and there, like an industrious hive of bees. Then from their own batteries, poured forth a steady stream of shot and shell, those iron throats screamed themselves hoarser and hoarser, as they belched destruction's fiercest flames, and sent a reverberating roar, up, up, to the blue arching skies beyond, borne on the crest of the horrid black cloud of smoke that ascended above the battlefield.

An answering charge came from the earthworks, ahead, giving back menace for menace, shot for shot, and death for death!

From where Phil stood, he could see the shell leave the mortars, sail slowly through the air toward him, fall to the ground and explode into thousands of pieces, it seemed to him, ploughing a hole that

resembled the great crater of some extinct volcano. He could not determine, when one of the giant projectiles hurtled toward him, whether it would strike near him and wrenching its sides apart, plough furrows in the ground at his very feet, or come to earth a thousand feet away, to scatter death-dealing fragments among another corps of his comrades.

While this was going on at the front, his company were gradually working their way to a less formidable portion of the enemy's defences, and fighting as they advanced, pushing up to within speaking distance, almost, of the men who were now plainly visible above the breastworks. In the thunder and rattle, accompanied by the regular boom, boom, of the cannon, all thoughts of home, or self, or even life itself, vanished, blown away by the mighty breath of war. Only, before Phil's eyes, dazzled by the sunlight on the glistening bayonets, ahead of him, one face went always, a pair of clear gray eyes looked steadily into his own and an enthusiastic voice said, "Oh, Phil, Phil, I want you to be a man—a hero. Make me proud of you—proud to say you fought and died, if need be, for your country's honor."

One after another his comrades fell about him, some silently, touched by the icy hand of the great destroyer before they had time to speak, some with a great cry of mortal agony, pitiful to hear, impossible to alleviate, and others cursing bitterly as they were slaughtered.

It was a horrible maelstrom of flashing lights, sudden thunders, sharp explosions, groans, cries, and curses, and it rang, rang, all about him, dinned in his ears like the clanging tongue of some massive, discordant bell.

Slowly, steadily, they mounted the slope ahead of them, pushing, crowding, fighting to be first to enter that enclosure, and plant there the stars and stripes. The batteries of the enemy replied now but feebly to the pounding shells that dropped within their walls; but the echoing thunders of the assaulting mortars crashed through the very heavens and called up great, black, threatening clouds from somewhere below the horizon.

From their station near the heavily wooded banks of a peaceful little stream, other troops, fresh and unjaded, wheeled across the open and advanced at almost a run, to the scene of battle. Everywhere, in the thickest of the fight, mounted men, officers, on noble chargers which sniffed the air of battle and stamped excitedly, rode, cheering and urging their men forward, imploringly, almost.

With grimy, blackened faces, the little band of soldiers with Phil Marsh in their midst, toiled up the slight eminence, only to be thrust back again and again, in the face of the solid sheet of flame that greeted their coming. They had cheered till their throats were hoarse. Their color-bearer, urged along by those behind him, came forward inch by inch, the shining folds of the glorious banner of freedom cutting through the clouds of smoke and powder that mingled far above it, and gently waving and tossing in undulating ripples, in the still mildly blowing breeze of the day.

One after another, mortally wounded, dropped, only to be stepped over by a comrade who took his place and carried the fight right into the enemies' midst. Sometimes they fired, sometimes, when there was not time to stop and reload, clubbed their guns and beat their way along the heights. Sud-

denly, there arose a great cry, hoarse and raucous, from a hundred parching throats, and all hearts stood still. Little by little, their foes receded, back, back, still farther, had they beaten them, and on and on, gloriously waving, came the flag they loved, toward the very peak of the highest rampart, where, but a moment ago, another flag had snapped in the stirring wind.

A hand reached forth and pulled down the silken banner fluttering there; but, with a groan, its owner fell dead, just at the moment of victory. Up, up, ran the boys in blue, surrounding the color-bearer, and urging, almost carrying him to the spot, flagless now, and pushing back at every step, with a great volley of shot, those who would as bravely have defended the position.

See, they are almost there!

See—the brilliant red, the glistening white—the heavenly blue—with its starry galaxy, floats proudly above the boyish heads that are advancing so bravely in the face of that deadly fire!

They are almost there—the color-bearer holds it high above his head, and shouts something inaudible in the terrible din, as they try to rally around him. With a sudden backward rush, the enemy carry the position again, and, shot through the heart, the brave lad who had borne the colors for them falls at their feet. A silence, so short that it is hardly sensed, falls over them. The flag has fallen from the nerveless hand that grasped it and low on the earth lies, quivering and fluttering, like some wounded thing. Again that oncoming rush; gun after gun speaks with deadly effect, and backward, backward, reluctantly, the enemy moves.

A strong arm grasps the split and sundered flag-staff, raises the silken folds, blood-stained and holy now, up, up, until they trail and wave in long undulations above the heads of the cheering, shouting boys in blue. A smoke-stained, pallid face rises beside the trembling folds, a steady arm carries them to their place, and holds them firmly there, amid that hell of fire and smoke and noise. It is Phil Marsh.

A sudden, deafening roar, a cheer that rends the heavens themselves, and rising above the clamor of the belching throats of iron, is borne to the ears of those who stand victorious there, comes up from the struggling legions below, as the flag gently unfolds itself to the breeze, shakes out its length in sinuous ripples, disclosing the sacred stain it has just received, and snaps and flutters over the head of the soldier who is holding it.

Back again, still downward, retreat those they are fighting against, and up, up, to the very place where waves the flag of freedom, advance those who have helped to win this victory. Suddenly there is a sharp report from the rear, the flag totters, trembles, and would have fallen had not another hand reached out and grasped it from the faltering one that held it.

All day the steady roar of the battle rages. Back and forth, back and forth, wrestle the contending forces. One place after another is carried only to be retaken again and again by those from whom it was wrested. In the awful confusion, so terrible that it beggars description, many a poor fellow lay unnoticed, uncared for, until long after the fighting was over.

His arm shattered, Phil Marsh dropped by the side of the flag he had so nobly helped to sustain, and

later, when his comrades had held the point thus gained until the enemy had retreated and turned their attention to another portion of the stormed defences, he was carried to a more secluded spot and left until attention could be given him. But in the confusion of the hotly contested field of battle, through all that long day of horrors, back and forth, past the spot where he lay, many times, the battle surged; and forgotten, unnoticed, where greater exigencies claimed attention, he lay bleeding, unconscious and alone.

When the sunset bell, in the far off city, solemnly chanted the angelus, the enemy could be seen in full retreat, leaving their dead and wounded where they had fallen. A great cloud of yellow dust marked their passage; and as the evening star broke through the purple clouds of sunset, the victorious army went into camp, tired, soiled and demoralized, for the time being, just at the edge of the dark woodland whose waving branches, all day, had sung a requiem for the dead, or whispered, perhaps, a supplication for the passing souls.

Then the moon, a dipping boat in a becalmed sea of deepest sapphire, rose and it was night on the battlefield.

All around the silent field, in a pallid circle, stretched the white tents of the surviving army. Scattered here and there, over the furrowed ground, ploughed deep by the rushing hordes that had contended in battle, lay the army of the dead and wounded, heroes who had gone forth at break of day, strong and radiant with the new wine of their young manhood, the flower of the youth of all the broad land, they had sprung to defend.

The gentle dews of heaven mingled with the death damp on many a pallid brow, drawn with suffering;

from many a parched mouth came deep, expiring groans that were caught up on the breezes of the night, and borne, perhaps, to houses far away, and the listening ears of those who lay awake, through the lengthening hours, in sharp suspense. The still faces of some of the dead, frozen into immobility, some with a smile on their lips, as if their last thoughts had been of the loved at home, some formed to horrid curses, or gasps of direst suffering, were turned upward, to the moonlight and the starshine, accusingly.

Some lay with arm thrown under the head as if asleep, and the gentle winds of the night softly stirred the dark masses of hair, damp with the moisture of death, above the pulseless brow.

And silently, through the darkness, with little gleaming lights, came by and by, angels of mercy, though their garb was often soiled and torn, and rent with bullets, in many cases, leaning down here and there, and putting to the parched lips a cooling drink, or gently closing eyes that had remained glued to the horror that had slain them. They bore the wounded to shelter, composed the limbs of the dead and left them for those who should give them burial rude, the next morning at sunrise.

And among those who were left, was a young fellow, with dark hair, in tangled masses, above his closed eyes, who lay carelessly, one arm thrown above his head, on his side, the other hidden beneath him. He was very cold and still. So they passed along into the darkness of the southern night, redolent with the scent of flowers, and jubilant with song. If they had lifted his head, they would have seen the face, pulse-

less and white, of Phil Marsh, the soldier of a day, the hero of one battle, who had done his best, and for whom the officers of his regiment were even now inquiring, having heard the story of his heroism.

CHAPTER XVI.

EPHRAIM Binks had returned from his short term of service, disillusioned. The long, hot marches, uncomfortable quarters, hastily snatched refreshments, and restless nights had contrived to unburden his mind of a good deal of its enthusiasm for the cause; and the many hard fought engagements in which he had participated, where there was little glory for the soldier, and death walked, a grinning shape, by his side in the ranks, had done the rest. So, when the time came for him to decide whether he would reenlist, he refused absolutely and point blank, to do so, and after some delay, returned to the peaceful shades of Woodley Centre.

He had not written to the home folks at all. A letter was among the hardest tasks his life had ever known, and he had been the butt of so much ridicule that he rarely paraded his deficiencies in this way. Phil had written him one letter, just after his departure, but in the bustle and confusion incident to the many changes his company encountered, it had never been forwarded, so that all the home news had escaped him.

Returning, he fell naturally into the old familiar routine, rising with the sun and retiring with its last radiant beams, performing all the heaviest portion of the farm work. If he missed the boys, who had made the life of the old home what it was, he did not complain. He noted the lines that were deepening around the firm set mouth of Sarah Marsh, and the heavy

shadows in her eyes, and silently, in many rough but kindly ways, he showed his sympathy. He tried, a grotesque failure in many respects, but with the best intentions, to take Phil's place with the father, that of the younger son with the mother. When Abel Marsh strolled away up the hill, to Solomon Penny's to hear the news, in the edge of the evening, he staid around the house, doing little chores for "Mis Marsh," and anticipating in many ways her slightest wishes.

He was careful not to allude to the dangers and privations he had suffered in the service, but always expatiated on the rare good fortune that had followed him in the thickest of the fight.

"Wal—p'raps everyone won't be as lucky," she would return doubtfully. "I know," he would say, "the other fellers allus used to say, 'a fool for luck,' 'an Eph'll come out all right. He'll tumble out o' the way, ef he can't git out no other way."

'Scilla, at the inevitable dishwashing, would stand open mouthed, with dripping hands, while he recounted his experiences and the admiring light deepened in her eyes. Once or twice she had essayed some of her joking tricks with him. He took it all good naturedly, generally headed her off and would remark dryly, "No use tryin' to fool me now, 'Scilla, sence I've bin in the service. A fellar that's bin tossed in a blanket, an' put up with a few other tricks they play there, ain't agoin' to be ketched by anythin' a gal can think up."

But there was no return to the old anxiety for her approbation, and it worried her.

So the days went on. It was autumn, but the summer still lingered, her beauteous draperies gathered

about her, ready for departure, taking a last, wistful, backward glance at the scene of her coming, her revells, her triumphs, while the approaching queen halted courteously, just on the threshold, with all her gaily clad retainers behind her. The mellow russet hues lay all over the fields and gardens, where gleamed, like gold through their dun shades, the yellow pumpkins.

The long streamers of ruined corn rustled silkily in the stirring winds that swept their trailing ribbons. Among the fields, a few bright poppies glowed, spared when the scythe had lowered the burdened wheat, and above all, at night, the great round yellow moon beamed and glowed in amber skies.

Hope Hamilton each day brought the papers and patiently read to Sarah Marsh the tiniest details of any movements of the troops in which her sons were stationed. When the company of which Francis was a member, remained so long in camp, her fears on his behalf were quieted somewhat and she would remark to Hope, "Wal, no news is good news. 'S long's they stay there, I don't' spose I ought to borry any trouble 'bout Francis, anyway. I spose they're liable to hev to start any time though, an' hev to fight. Do see if you can find anythin' 'bout Phil's comp'ny."

Patiently, the girl would search the long column of the paper until she found where the other son was stationed. Lately, there had been exciting news about Phil's regiment. They had reached Washington. They had gone into camp. Camp had been broken. They had been ordered to march. They were nearing the enemy's redoubts. They had received orders

to advance, right into the midst of the works of the foe.

The heart of the mother stood still, as these bits of information were read to her. Then, one day, when the afternoon was well spent, Hope had brought the paper and there were anxious lines between her eyes and a worried look about her mouth.

"There will be a battle tomorrow," she said, "everything is in readiness and our soldiers are already within sight of the enemy."

Mrs. Marsh looked up from her knitting calmly.

"Wal, let us hope for the best," she said quietly, "they won't all be killed — tain't likely to me — an' p'raps they won't pick out my boy to be one of them to git hit. Anyway," conclusively, "I sh'll just think he ain't agoin' to git hurt," and she closed her mouth determinedly. "I am sure I hope so," Hope asserted, "but it must be grand, to go into battle so, face such awful danger, and if need be, die for one's country." The girl's face glowed, her eyes were shining.

"Don't you believe it." Ephraim stood just inside the sitting-room door. He had come in, in time to overhear her remark. "I tell you, an' I've ben there, — it ain't no great fun. The last thing I thought of, was my country — I wan't lookin' out for her at all."

Hope smiled mischievously.

"What were you thinking of, Ephraim?" she asked him.

"Myself," promptly. "I was that skeered, the fust fight I went into, that all I thought of, or all that bothered me, was how to git out with a whole skin. An' there wan't a durned chance to git out neither, when you'd got in. They was packed in to my back, it seemed to me, thick as sardines, an' pushin,' shovin'

me all the time, right into the face of them consarned guns on the other side. Makes me sweat to think of it now."

Hope laughed. "It's very evident," she said, "that the din of battle cured you of enthusiasm."

"You bet," replied Ephraim stolidly, "why, when they gin me my discharge, I fairly hooted, I was so all fired glad. I dunno," doubtfully, "whether 'twas right or not, but I felt that way. I was just as anxious, too, when I started out, as any of 'em. Farmin's good enough fur me, now," and he grinned exuberantly. He amused Hope mightily. She looked on his expressions concerning the naked facts of warfare, with good-natured tolerance, but she did not judge all men by Ephraim. She felt that his nature was not expansive enough to comprehend all the great principles involved and it was difficult to get him away from the hard realities of the situation. With Francis, her ideal man, it would be different. He knew something of the glow that kindled in her own bosom and burned and flamed with every story of heroism that came from the front. She felt sure his enthusiasm, his loyalty, were of the lasting sort, and would burn as brightly after the last gun had fired as now. The mere details of warfare she knew would escape him, and his nobler soul would exult in the great results, the stirring climax.

With Sarah Marsh, it was different still, in a way. One side of her nature was practical and this revolted at the realistic tales Ephraim had brought from the scene of war. But the other, and spiritual side, gloried in the sacrifice she herself had made in the heroic gift of her sons to her country, and she

was as eager as ever a Roman mother had been, that they should acquit themselves with credit and honor. She went to bed that night, her heart throbbing with contradictory emotions. She was proud, grateful to God who had given her such sons, glad she had given them up, patiently, without a visible struggle, but anxious, troubled and saddened by the reports of the imminent danger of one of them.

It was a beautiful night, as she raised the curtain of her window, and looked out into the solemn stillness. Far as her eyes could reach, the luminous atmosphere seemed to shimmer in voluptuous waves, wind blown and star bejeweled, and the skies amber and liquid, like an untroubled sea, rolled away and away, from her window, to the camp and battle-field where her sons were sleeping.

It was so holy, calm and still here that she could hardly realize the possibility of the crash and din and thunders of battle rising to these peaceful skies. She disrobed and went to bed. But she could not sleep. In fancy, she was following the serried ranks of the marching soldiers and her heart beat steadily within her bosom, as the sound of their tramping feet beat on the rough roadway between.

These same skies, these softly scintillant stars looked down on her marching boy tonight, and the same light glowed on his features that she had watched through her window. Were his feet tired? Did they ache? Did he long for his quiet bed at home and the safe shelter of his father's roof? Would he shrink from the ordeal of the morrow, shrink and cringe and falter, ay, even as now, her own heart was doing, though outwardly he went to his death bravely, and with that smile she had so often seen on his lips.

Phil was such a quiet boy! Hardly anyone ever knew when he suffered, and he was always gentle and good natured.

She held her hands out to him in the darkness of her room. Perhaps she had not been as tender as she ought. He had never seemed to appeal to her for visible signs of sympathy, as Francis had. Had she understood him? Had he wanted it, after all, but gone his way, unasking, because it was not offered?

Her husband breathed steadily by her side. He was wearied by the exertions of the day, and tired nature would assert itself above all the anxieties of the mind.

The house was very still. Not a sound disturbed the calm of nature, outside, save the occasional far off chirp of some bird that sang the death song of the year, or the muffled tread of stamping live stock in the barn.

Sleep was impossible for her. She arose noiselessly and threw a light garment about her shoulders. There was a subdued radiance in the sitting-room, neither darkness nor light, but a blending of both that was soft, intangible, and weirdly penetrating. She went out there and sat down in her chair by the window. With peering eyes, she tried to pierce the shadows that lay thickly between her and the lonely road whereon, with steady tramp, the soldiers marched.

She looked out of the window, at the western sky. It was darkly blue and translucent in the peculiar light that pervaded the atmosphere. The starshine pierced its deeply shaded folds and pinned them back, disclosing all the beauties of the wondrous

panorama beneath. Sleeping homes lay on many a broad hillside. Trees flaunted their heavy branches in the wind and waved them, like long arms, draped in hanging robes of misty tints. Still waters gleamed and quivered in the mellow light, reflecting on their placid bosoms the stars and clouds laid there by the gentle hands of the goddess of night.

Suddenly, in the far west, where the sky was one long clinging curtain, foldless and luminous, of darkly tinted blue, a faint streak of crimson flung itself across the background of the heavens and remained there, a glowing contrast to the azure of their hue. She watched it curiously. Another and still another bar of vivid crimson flashed into place. Between these ribbons of flame, others, of shining, glistening white, appeared, connecting them. The wind blew them into winding folds, a few bright stars twinkled into space in a field of blue, lighter than the background of the skies, and she beheld, thrown into strong relief, across the very heavens, mingling its folds with the flag of the universe, the silken ripples of the flag of freedom!

Spellbound she gazed. There it hung, staff, folds and all. She could see its silken texture rising, ripple on ripple, great, grand, across the western skies, count its bars, its stars, and in fancy, hear the rustle of its folds as it was stirred by the night winds.

Then, gradually, as she watched, it faded, dissolved, vanished. No part of it died out of that wonderful, shimmering sea of blue, before another, but all were withdrawn gently, losing their color gracefully, until again the sky was an unbroken curtain of shadeless color and God's banner of the universe, blue with its golden stars, waved above a troubled land.

She turned mutely away from the window and went back to her bed, her heart strangely stirred; but a restful quiet, inspired by the symbol of her country's protection, was diffused through all her mentality.

The next day when Hope brought the paper, she told her of the magnificent sight the heavens had unrolled to her eyes, the previous night.

"Perhaps it is a good omen," said the girl gently, as she unfolded the paper to read the account of the battle. Abel Marsh had left the harvest fields and come up to hear the news. 'Scilla stood with arms akimbo, inside the doorway, and Ephraim shuffled into the room, backed up against the brick oven, and prepared to listen.

Carefully, she read each detail of the engagement in which each was so interested a listener. Suddenly, her voice faltered and she paused, with moist eyes.

"Hear this," she said; and then, in reverent tones almost, she continued. "During the hardest of the fighting, when the chances for victory seemed evenly divided, a sudden diversion in favor of the attacking forces was made. Up one side of the redoubtable breastworks rushed a little company of men, their color bearer in their midst. Bravely they fought back the enemy, repulsed again and again by the solid sheets of flame that came from the guns directly it seemed, in their faces, when, all at once, the color bearer, urged and borne along by his comrades, raised the flag, where but a moment before the banner of the foe had been. A bullet from a gun in the hands of one of the opposing party found his heart, and he fell dead, still grasping the flag, whose immaculate folds were fast staining with his life blood. In-

stantly, from out of the ranks, a hand was put forth, a strong arm grasped the staff from the nerveless one that held it, and bore it proudly to the very summit of the breastworks, where it staid until the enemy were routed and fled in confusion, not, however, until one of their number had shot the flag from the hand of the brave soldier boy who held it there, a target himself, for all their guns. The name of the hero was Philip Marsh, the company was Co. B of — Reg't., but when the lists were made up after the battle, his name was reported among the missing."

The last word fell on the little group in the homely sitting room, amid unbroken silence. The voice of the girl rang triumphantly out and ceased, for her heart was too full for further utterance. Sarah Marsh wiped her spectacles on the corner of her gingham apron, and looked out of the window into vacancy, it seemed. Did she still see the folds of the great flag floating there in the western sky?

Abel Marsh blew his nose loudly, but did not speak. He could not be the first to break that solemn silence; he felt that words of his would be futile to voice his feelings. So he was dumb.

Suddenly 'Scilla put her apron to her eyes, burst into loud and unrestrained weeping, and rushed out of the room.

And then, Ephraim Binks straightened himself up, drawing away from the oven door, where he had been leaning, uttered a loud preliminary "hem" — and blurted out — "that settles it. I'm goin' back agin' — to find Phil —". Then his voice broke, and like 'Scilla, he rushed from the room, in tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

I 'M agoin' to find Phil, Mis' Marsh, an' I ain't a comin' home till I've got him," Ephraim declared a few days later.

"The Lord go with you, Ephrum," she ejaculated piously, wiping the moisture from her spectacles with her scant gingham skirt, "but I'm 'fraid you'll fail. It's a big world, Ephrum—a big world—an' you'll be sure to miss each other. 'Sides, he may be dead by now." She spoke calmly, but Ephraim, who could read below the surface of her composure, replied, confidently, "No, he ain't either, Mis' Marsh. I'm sure o' that, an' I don't care neither, if it is a big world—it ain't big enough to keep me from Phil when he needs me. He was good to me, Mis' Marsh, when all the rest luffed in my face, an' he never made fun of any awkward capers I cut up. He'd allus pull me out of it, some way, an' now, I'm goin' to pull him out, if it takes a leg—or two," with a downward glance at his own sturdy members. "I said," he continued, presently, "that there wan't nothin' thet could git me out to them gol blarsted battle grounds agin'; but, by gum," bringing his hand forcibly down on the table, "thar is, — an' it's Phil!"

Sarah Marsh looked at him queerly. "I'll help ye all I can, Ephrum," she said quietly, and he knew that those few simple words meant more from her than the most eloquent thanks from another woman.

His preparations were hastily made, and one morn-

ing in early fall, he stood in the low door of the old farmhouse, bidding them all good-bye.

"Good-bye, Eph." Abel Marsh gripped his hand tightly and his voice sounded husky as he bade the youth Godspeed.

"Good-bye, Ephrum." Sarah Marsh looked into his eyes a moment, before she relinquished his hand, "I sh'll pray for you," she said in a low tone.

"Do," he returned chokingly, "an' I sh'll surely find him — I know I sh'll."

He turned away, his heart too full for further speech, and marched steadily down to the gate. Abel Marsh and his wife went slowly into the house, the long lines from the westering sun lighting up their faces, accentuating the hopefulness Ephraim's words had brought to life there.

At the gate, 'Scilla stood, with downcast eyes and crimsoned cheeks. She held out her hand. "Good-bye, Ephrum," she said hesitatingly.

He took her hand, held it an instant, and dropped it.

"I — I hope — you'll come back," the girl faltered, "I hope you won't git killed."

"I shan't," shortly, "there ain't no danger of that. It takes a fool for luck, you know," and with a last good-by, called over his shoulder, he sloped off down the dusty road. 'Scilla went back to the house disheartened. All her overtures for peace had failed. What had come over Ephraim? She had fancied that he would respond instantly to any sign of yielding on her part, and she could hardly associate this nonchalant fellow whose one idea was to find his friend and who seemed to have forgotten her, with the importunate, pleading lover, whose only happiness had been in the light of her eyes.

They had one letter from Ephraim after his departure. It was an ill scrawled piece of chirography, and the services of Hope had to be called in to decipher it.

"I'm on my way to Washington," it read, "agin', an' you wunt here no more frum yures trully, till I've got Phil. So no more frum — E Binks."

They all laughed. It was so droll. "Just like Ephraim for all the world," said Hope, "a diamond in the rough, but his heart is in the right place."

"You bet," and Abel Marsh raised the rafters with a hearty guffaw. "Eph'll fall in or blunder in where he wants to, and where a good many wiser heads'd fail. Oh, you let him alone! He'll come back all right, and —" he concluded confidently, "he'll bring Phil. You see if he don't."

Sarah Marsh was silent. She was not so hopeful.

Hope was there, too, when the next letter came from Francis. She and Laura Sherburne had walked down the sloping hillside, after school was over, in the cool of the day, and stopped on the way, at Solomon Penny's store which was also the general post office.

"No letter for you, Mis' Sherburne," he called out as they entered the little store, "but one for Aunt Sarah Marsh. Be you goin' that way?"

"Yes," Hope returned, "I always go down every night now, and I will gladly take this letter along."

He gave it to her and they passed out. Laura was very sober and Hope rallied her.

"What," she cried, trying to gaze into her friend's eyes, under the daintily trimmed "shaker" she was wearing, "are you glooming already? And because a letter has not come! It is not past time. I am

afraid you will make a poor soldier's wife if you get despondent, thus easily," and she wound her arm lovingly about her friend's waist.

"I am not despondent, Hope," Laura answered seriously, "but you know we read so much of the terrible fortunes of war. Here today, and gone tomorrow! I am only at rest, for just the littlest time after his letters have come. Then I begin to be uneasy until I hear again. There is plenty of time, between them, for a shot to end my happiness—break my heart. Oh, this cruel war, Hope,—will it never,—never end, and we have those we love at home again? I do not see how you can take it all so calmly. Am I so cowardly, or what is the difference?"

"I am not like you, dear," Hope returned, slowly, "I do not take such instant alarm and then, you know, there must be some cheerful ones to make it easier for those who worry. There does not seem to be much for me to do, but that," with a pensive little smile, "just distribute my sunshine to others."

"You are a dear girl, Hope," said her companion, "a noble girl, and your sweet example should reprove me for my ceaseless repinings. But here we are, already, and there is Aunt Sarah at the gate, watching for us."

Sarah Marsh stood at the front gate, her long gingham apron turned up around her head, its corner held tightly between her teeth. A few tendrils of her iron gray hair blew wildly to and fro, above her forehead, in a vicious little breeze that prevailed, and her short skirt, of some homespun material of dark brown, was twisted closely about her ankles and the heavy shoes she wore. Her arms, bared to the

elbow, and burned rich russet, by the sun and wind, were akimbo. One soft ribbon of light from the now declining sun, just touched her face gently, blending the marks of sorrow and pain that were there, and bringing out the strong characteristics of her features. It was a helpful face to look at, calm, rugged, and reposeful.

"Hello, girls," she called as they came in sight, "I was watchin' for you. An' a letter, too? Wal, that's good. Come right in, an' set down, an' you, Hope, open the letter an' read it out loud to us."

These letters had always been common property since Francis had gone away, so Hope hastened to comply with the elder woman's wish, as soon as they were seated inside the house.

"Dear Mother:—" it began. "It is the same old story, only a trifle more gloomy, this time, if anything. I wrote you in my last, that I had seen Phil, for a brief moment only, and I hoped then, that our 'marching orders' would come next. But they did not. Only yesterday, for sometimes news travels more slowly at headquarters than in your distant home, I heard how my brother had distinguished himself on the field of battle, and following closely on the heels of that came the tidings that he was 'missing.' Well, I can but feel, though my heart is heavy, that even that is better than 'killed' or 'seriously wounded,' so try to keep up your courage—my mother is a brave woman and hardly needs that advice,—and think that Phil, our Phil, will come home some day, soon, with the promotion he so richly deserves. I wish, with all my heart, that we had gone straight from here to the battlefield, as soon as we had arrived. I do not know

why the delay is, but I do know that it has affected my health seriously. You see, we went into camp first, on an eminence, where, so to speak, it was high and dry. Since then, we have broken camp twice and once returned to the second camp we made as you have probably observed from my letters, bivouacking in the rain, marching and countermarching, a matter of twelve miles, sometimes remaining in an open field for three days at a time, manoeuvring all the time, and accomplishing nothing! Sometimes I have pitched my tent on dry ground. Again, my blankets have been soaked full as a sponge when I awoke from my troubled dreams at daylight.

"I find that there is a hereditary or constitutional weakness of my chest that will not permit of such treatment. Please do not be needlessly alarmed. I have tried to keep this from you, but think it best now that you should know, for perhaps it may mean a furlough for me. I shall be glad, of course, to see all the dear home faces again, but I am bitterly disappointed that I am not permitted to have at least a chance to show my country and her enemies what I feel for her, and what I am willing to do for her honor. But then, if I do not improve, if I should be obliged to come home, there is all the greater chance that I may go back with renewed strength and enthusiasm, to the cause that has become so dear to me. I think I should congratulate myself —"

Hope paused abruptly and looked from one to the other of her listeners.

"Read — read on," cried Laura, anxiously, "there is something more, Hope — it is about John — tell me quickly."

"Yes," Hope answered slowly, running her eye down the sheet, "Francis does mention John, but

don't look so white, dear, and so — so stricken, she implored, "it is not so very dreadful."

The girl's white lips framed the words, "go on, please," stiffly.

The soft light was fading from the western sky, as Hope took up the letter again, and continued reading; and its flaming colors flashed back over the whole length of the sky line, one blush before departing flooded the room with its crimson glory. The face of Laura Sherburne seemed ghastly in the sudden radiance.

"I think I should congratulate myself, that after all, I am not so badly off as some of my compatriots. I want to break this gently as I can, to you, mother, and you will, I know, be tender in telling it to the girls, and especially to her, who, under other circumstances, should be with her husband now. A whole regiment returned from a hard fought and well won battle yesterday, passing through our camp en route. Those who were only fatigued remained with us for rest and recuperation, before they should be ordered again to the front. The wounded were passed along and transferred to the hospitals, at Washington. Among them was my friend, the friend of all Woodley Centre — John Sherburne. A nobler fellow never lived. I saw him for a brief moment, at his request, and held his hand. He is wounded through the arm and side, dangerous but by no means fatal wounds, so the surgeons assured me. He asked me, with his own lips, to communicate this to the home people, and I have tried to do it in the best way I can. "Tell them," he whispered, for he was very weak, "to break it gently to Laura — my wife — and —" his whole face broke into the most beautiful

smile I have ever seen, "tell them to tell her that if she bears her suffering nobly, patiently, as I am trying to do, it will ease the burden of mine. As soon as I am able, I will write."

Hope's voice died away into the farthest corners of the room, shaken and tremulous, and she raised her eyes to Laura's face, expecting to see it bathed in tears. She was sitting in the shadow, now, her eyes partly turned to the fading light, but as the sound of Hope's voice ceased, she turned and her glance fell full on the other two women.

"You must take my school for me, Hope," she said gently, with a great light shining in her earnest eyes, "because—because—I am going out there—to take care of my husband—and the other soldier boys who need me."

And Hope answered, her own eyes mirrors of her friend's exaltation, "I wish I had your opportunity, dear. I wish I could go too. But my place seems to be here, and it is the harder place." Did she remember a boyish face, an untried voice that had said those very words to her but a short time since? Hero, now, his name written high among those who have bled for their country, and among the missing as well.

It was even as Laura Sherburne had said. Within a few days, she had gone away from the little town of her nativity, speeding toward the great hospital where her husband lay, for she had sought and obtained permission to nurse him if she would also devote part of her time to other wounded men. This she promised gladly to do.

Hope cried a little over her, kissed her and promised to take very good care of the little school, the lonely father and mother charging her at the

same time with many messages for Francis, should she see him.

In brief time a letter was returned from her, written as soon almost as she arrived. John was still dangerously ill, but he had known her, and the surgeons all said her presence was like new wine to him and they gave her all hope of his eventual recovery.

"But I must tell you this, dearest sister and friend," she concluded: "obtaining leave of absence from my husband's side, when I could safely leave him to the care of other good nurses, I paid a visit to Francis at the camp, just outside Washington, under the escort of John's lieutenant, who is convalescing from a flesh wound at our hospital. I found the poor boy desperately ill, lying on the ground, in his tent, racked with coughing but uttering no complaint. He has asked for a furlough, but there is so much detail. If I were Aunt Sarah, I would have Mr. Marsh come for him at once, for it is very plain to me that if he secures a furlough, he will not be able to travel the distance alone."

Hope, her heart sinking with deadly alarm, communicated this to Sarah Marsh. And a few days later, Abel Marsh turned his back on the old home, his face to the city whose distress had wrung the heart of the world, leaving behind him a lonely woman who sat all day quietly by the southern window of her home, and watched and waited for his return.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SO long a journey was decidedly an unaccustomed experience for Abel Marsh. He was content to remain quietly in his peaceful home, among his flocks and herds, and to contemplate his growing crops with satisfaction. He had no desire to explore those portions even, of his native land, which had been the subject recently of so much of his reading.

But when this exigency, like all others of his life, had arisen, it had found him fully prepared. He donned the fine black broadcloth suit that had only done service on Sundays and special occasions, for a goodly number of years, a heavily brocaded satin vest, and stock tie of the same material, wound twice around his high linen collar of immaculate whiteness. His massive silver watch reposed securely in one pocket of the satin vest, held in place by a cable chain also of silver, whose guard was a serpent's head.

It was growing late in the fall, so he took with him a long top coat of the finest beaver, and surmounting the whole by a high hat of hardly the most recent date, he quitted the quiet haunts of Woodley Centre for those untried scenes of which he had no conception.

The journey passed uneventfully, and one crisp morning he reached Washington. Washington, the heart of a mighty nation, rent and torn with the conflicting passions of those who frequented its streets. He had had no idea, before, of the magni-

tude of the conflict now raging. True, he had read the papers, and fancied that he had assimilated their contents; he had seen numberless soldiers in the cars, on his way out, whole regiments being pushed rapidly to the front; but through a haze of unreality, as it were.

But here, the very streets teemed with military life, war was in the air he breathed, his dreams became martial, when at the close of a weary day, he retired to his room in one of the great hotels, whose lobbies were filled with lounging men in blue, officers and gentlemen, who, it seemed to his unsophisticated eyes, conducted their campaigns more by wordy war than actual participation in the deadly conflict of the battle-field. The extent of the corruption brought to the city by such an influx of foreign material overwhelmed him, by its magnitude. On every side, wherever he went, he beheld gambling and debauchery. Provost guards scoured the city constantly for deserters, always meeting with success in their efforts; and at short intervals, during the night, the same guards made their rounds in search of officers absent without leave.

Filthy, ragged contrabands abounded everywhere, office seekers, contract hunters, spies, reprobates of every possible grade, adventuresses, blackmailers, cowards, had flowed into the capital from outside and made of it a catch-basin of foulness.

It was the natural accompaniment of a war such as this, when hundreds of thousands of men were going to their chances of death or horrible mutilation, every day, every hour, millions upon millions of dollars being wasted in a conflict that seemed almost interminable.

It was an education for him. Never before had he realized to what extent the baser passions of man can lead him.

Having established himself in quarters convenient to all the official buildings, his first duty was to secure a pass and visit the camp of his son. Then he learned something of the intricate machinery that must be set moving before so simple a request as this could be granted. The vast number of invalid and wounded soldiers awaiting transportation to their homes and the various hospitals, rendered anything like haste absolutely impossible to accomplish.

Of course, to the father's heart, with the mother's voice ringing in his ears, the delay seemed cruel and interminable. But war is cruel and one soldier is no more than another, one case no more deserving of attention than the next, at such times.

After a week, during which he haunted the corridors of the military and executive offices, even going so far as to offer generous bribes, he finally received the treasured slip of paper. With that in his hand, he could go anywhere within the lines, and he hastened to make use of it. He was conducted to the tent of his son, and raising the flap, entered. On a narrow cot in one corner, a pale and emaciated youth lay, his chest racked with a hollow cough, his cheeks and eyes alight with the feverish fires that were consuming his vitality. He could not credit the evidence of his senses. Could this be his boy, Francis?

A weak voice called joyfully, "Father!" and a thin hand was reached out to grasp his. He blew his nose loudly before he spoke.

"That you, my boy? How long you been like this? Why didn't you write before an' let me come an' git you? This ain't no fit place for you anyway.

Why hain't you been carried to the hospital?" He was excited, indignant.

"I don't know, father." The thin, twining fingers still clasped his own while the other hand motioned him to a seat on a camp stool near by. "There are so many of us, and so many wounded, that those who are merely sick have to wait. I have done very well and comrades are so kind. I tell you it is the right kind of medicine to see your face and I shall be well soon enough. I hated to tell you. I begged of Laura, when she was out here, not to send for you, but she was firm. I think now, myself, it will be best for me to go home awhile, on a furlough, recuperate, and then come back. Father—" as the elder man would have protested, "I cannot give it up, you know. I want to do something and I must. Think of Phil. Isn't it just glorious—and I am sure you would not deny me the same privilege."

"I'd a darn sight ruther hev both on ye at home agin—an' well, than where ye be," returned his father doggedly. Francis laughed outright.

"That has done me a world of good," he said, "so like you. But you'll give in, when you see how strong I'll be when mother has fed me up and I am home again. Now, tell me all the news—all about the home folks," and he lay back closing his eyes contentedly, but still clinging to the roughened hand on the coverlid, while his father related to him all the happenings of the past summer. Finally, when the shadows of an early twilight were closing in, the elder man arose to go.

"I'm comin' agin, tomorrow,—with a doctor—" he said with a certain grimness in his voice, "I don't like that tarnation cough—it jest hangs on too long to suit me—an' I'm going to git it cured for

you, 'fore we start home where the weather ain't nigh so mild as 'tis here. I've got to look after your furlough, too. Keep up your grit, boy, an' I'll see you through all right."

He stood up, buttoned up his overcoat and pulled on a thick pair of worsted gloves. "I'm all right, Father," the voice from the bed replied, "I feel lots better. Just hurry the old furlough up, because you know, the sooner I get home, the sooner I'll come back." He smiled lightly and called out a cheery "Good night," as his father quitted the tent.

The young physician who came next day, looked grave and motioned the elder man to follow him into the outer air.

"You want to get him home at once," he whispered; "the home influence is what he needs, and you see, he's acclimated to your rough New England weather and he isn't to this. A good stiff east wind, I verily believe, is better for you Puritans, than our milder zephyrs." He looked mildly disgusted and Abel Marsh returned to the tent. "What did he say?" asked Francis, raising himself up in the bed.

"Said you'd orter go home — at once," was the terse reply, "an' I ain't agoin' to waste no time git-tin' there — not ef I hev to see Abe Lincoln himself."

Francis laughed heartily at this, and declared his intention of rising. With his father's help, he dressed and sat for a while, by the little table where he had written his home letters. The next day and the next, the old man came into the little tent, and the mute, questioning eyes put the same query to him. "The furlough?"

Each time, Abel Marsh sadly shook his head. "But I'll bring it next time, surely," he would add hopefully.

Every day he haunted the quarters of those in authority, and each day he saw the fatal weakness creeping closer still to the heart of his well loved and younger son. It was of no use to storm or entreat. Money would do something, and money he threw about as generously as if he were a king of capital instead of the simple farmer he was. He and Death, grim, terrible, were fighting for a life, a fight as fierce, as sharp, though silent, as the battle raging on yonder gory field. Who would win?

Each day's delay, he knew, would make recovery all the more difficult, and so he superhumanly struggled for that precedence that meant so much to him. He had lost Phil. He could not lose Francis. For the mother's sake, too, he groaned and perspired in the conflict. Still he seemed to gain but little ground. He was referred to this one, to that one, only at the very end of the line to be told, "When your turn comes, Sir, we shall be glad to hear your request. At present, there are hundreds, yes thousands, ahead of you, and all applicants must wait their turn."

Were not the lives of those other young fellows as precious as that of his son? Surely, but to the extent of his fortune, would he purchase preference for his boy if by so doing he could hope to increase his chances one jot or tittle.

But the matter dragged, and three wet rainy weeks went by.

Then one day he sought audience with the President, himself.

At first he was denied admission. But patiently he persisted, and finally won the day, and stood in that august presence. At sight of the chief magistrate, all his reserve vanished. Here was a man, no magnate, potentate, arbitrary, but just a man, like himself,

homely, uncouth and commonplace. He saw, when he entered that state apartment where he had been bidden to go, a man of unusual height, thin yet strong and muscular, an attenuated, almost cadaverous face with large, prominent features, black hair and heavy eyebrows. His forehead was massive, square, and well developed; his complexion dark and sallow. But the smile on that rugged face, as he turned to meet the newcomer, a stranger to him, and withal, among the least influential of the subjects of the great government whose head he was, was heavenly.

There was such charm and beauty about his expression, such good humor and friendly spirit in the eyes above his own, that Abel Marsh did not notice whether the figure he was surveying were awkward or graceful, but held out his hand and said quite simply, "How do you do, Mr. Lincoln? I hope I find you well," with all the courteous suavity of a gentleman of the old school.

"How do you do, neighbor?"

The kindly eyes looked quizzically into his own, and the long hand grasped his with a friendliness that was not assumed. The salutation was followed by the quick question, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

Abel Marsh replied honestly, "Ye-us. You can, if you will. I've lost one of my boys in this war, an' I don't want to lose the other if I can help it."

Briefly and naturally, the father related the story of the heroism of his elder son, and how he had vanished from their ken, reported "missing," and then went on to describe the ambitions and aspirations of the younger, his enlistment and the bitter disappointment he had suffered in not being able to bear arms for his beloved country. "He wants to go home a little while now," he concluded, "an' rest an' git built up

agin. He thinks his mother can doctor him up so's he'll be able to come back by and by. But he's failin' awful fast — I can see that myself — an' — ” desperately, as he lowered his eyes to the gorgeous carpet at his feet, “ ef I don't git a furlough pretty soon, I can't git him home.”

The eyes of the great man, so human in his greatness, moistened with tears as the simple story proceeded, and when it was concluded, he rose, and crossing the room, said, “ I'll make that all right, at once, too. With this paper which I shall give you, you will have no trouble in getting a furlough for your boy. We want them all, every mother's son of them, all such boys as yours, in the army, and if this one can get well by going home, let mine be the hand to send him.”

He paused beside a desk, wrote a few lines, folded it and resumed, “ There, that'll fetch it, I guess.” Then he grasped again the hand of the honest farmer. “ Good-bye,” he said, “ and God be with you. Tell your boys' mother to pray for us. We need the prayers of the mothers of this nation.”

Almost before he realized it, Abel Marsh was ushered into the street by the obsequious attendants, still clasping tightly the precious strip of paper.

The magic of that name unlocked doors that were closed to him before, loosened frozen tongues, and rendered apologetic and accommodating previously reserved officials, so that, in the short space of twenty-four hours, he held in his hand another document, the furlough that gave him the right to return with his son to his peaceful home. His preparations were soon made. They tarried a few days at the hotel where he was stopping, to give Francis opportunity for rest and to regain in a measure the strength he had lost, and then, cheerfully, they set out on the return journey.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE noontide sun was pouring its fiercest heat into an unroofed prison pen. No sound could be heard save the steady tramp, tramp, of the guard outside the dead line, and an occasional groan from one of the suffering soldiers within. There was no shade anywhere. The quivering shafts searched out every corner and beat mercilessly on the unprotected heads that drooped beneath them.

One fierce lance darted into the very eyes of a youth who was sitting disconsolately apart. Suddenly, a companion moved nearer. "What are you thinking of?" he inquired with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"Shall I tell you?" The reply was wistful, pathetic.

"Yes."

"Well, I was thinking of the spring on father's place, just back of the orchard. There are flowers there and grasses all about it, and it is so deep — so deep —" he paused dreamily, then continued, "that no one has ever found its bottom. We used to, just for fun, drop a cup in, but it went out of sight in a moment. The water was clear and cold." He finished abruptly and was silent.

"There is water here," said his companion encouragingly, for he had noted the fever in the boy's eyes.

"Where?" listlessly.

"Over there," and the elder man pointed to the opposite side of the pen, "a small stream runs through

these grounds, so they say who have been here some time. Come, shall we find it?"

The younger man rose to his feet quickly. "There were ferns," he said, "beside this spring on father's place. Their great green leaves hung far over the water, and it was seldom that any sunlight entered there."

Together they made their way through long lines of their sick and dying comrades, to the other side of the pen, where the water ran. A low gurgle reached their ears as they approached. With a sigh of satisfaction, the younger knelt beside the brook, and joining his hands, as he had done so many times above the old spring at home, prepared to drink. The elder man waited smilingly for him to finish. For a moment, he knelt there. Then, with a quick gesture of disgust, he arose. His hands were empty, his lips dry.

"Did you drink?" asked his companion.

"No," and the fever light sprang up anew in his eyes. "I cannot drink that."

The elder man knelt. Then he, too, arose. "It has been fouled," he said simply, but a look of quiet despair dawned in his eyes. So they stood there, motionless, hopeless, and the steady glare of the molten sun was all about them. Then the elder man turned once more. "See that rock," he said, pointing to the barren side of a great rock, "in a few moments the sun will have passed to its other side, and there will be shade there."

"But no water," groaned the boy.

Wearily they dropped down in the narrow line of shadow that skirted the rock, and lay for some moments silent.

"I can hear my spring bubble now," murmured the boy. But the man did not reply. He was gloom-

ily watching the shimmering heat that descended to the baking earth, only to be reflected back again to the yellow skies that had sent it.

So the afternoon wore away. The shade about the rock grew wider. One by one, a few other comrades crawled into the grateful shadow. The great ball of fire into which the sun had resolved itself hung still threateningly in the western sky. The slimy brook crept like a loathsome serpent at their feet. Drowsiness, born of the great heat, came over the little group. And while they lay thus, with eyes closed and pulses throbbing in unison with every beat of the quaking atmosphere, a great cloud arose.

It spread its wings, like the angel of death, far and wide, enveloping the yellow sky, the tiny clouds, and finally, shrouding even that great ball of shimmering fire in its dusky folds. The sky was black. From behind that dense curtain came mutterings and rumblings of thunder. Great streaks of lightning rent its folds in twain, but a heavy wind blew them together again.

The elder soldier sat upright. "Thank God," he said, "we shall have some rain."

He looked about him. Some of the soldiers were on their knees. But they were not afraid. They were praying for rain.

Suddenly, the battle began. They knew the cannon's roar, were familiar with the rattle of shell and musketry, and their eyes had beheld the flash that preceded death; but this had no terrors for them. It was grand, sublime. It was from heaven itself. One long line after another cleft the inky blackness, twisted and squirmed till it reached the earth, only to be followed by the deafening crashes of thunder that died away in faint reverberations in the very bowels of

the earth. Suddenly, one more terrific than the rest burst through the sable curtain that draped the storm, and hissing, writhing and snapping, struck straight at the heart of the great rock. Mingled with the crashing thunder, came a splitting and grinding of the rock.

Then for a second, there was silence.

The soldiers raised their eyes. A great rift was in the solid rock, and through it poured a stream of limpid water, loosened by the lightning's power. And in the inky sky above them, from whence were falling drops of rain, a rift was also, and through it shone a stream of sunlit azure sky.

And the spring remained.

So that, while they were there, the soldiers' lives were spared. For that stream could not be fouled. It came from the same source as the spring on the old New England homestead, — the heart of God Himself!

And years after, when the clouds of war had rolled away and all was peace, the youth, now a man with silvered hair, stood again by the spring that flowed beneath the orchard trees, and his thoughts travelled far back, through the battle-fields and the cannon's roar, to that translucent water, gushing from the solid rock; and in his heart, both springs had one source, one mission.

Like droves of cattle, each day almost, companies of men were hurried into the Southern prison pen, under the fiercely beating rays of a tropical sun, hatless, shoeless, fatigued with the long marches, starving almost for a mouthful of less revolting food than had been their portion.

Listlessly, the soldiers who had been there for some time, saw them enter, beheld their haggard countenances, the great masses of tangled hair that shaded the unshaven faces, looked at the rags that had once been uniforms, and contrasted their appearance with their own, which was infinitely worse.

All day they loafed in the blazing sunlight unkempt, uncared for and unfed, and no new thing stirred them. This was the glory for which they had fought, this the climax of their heroism and their wounds, to die in this reeking place, of the horrors of filth and disease with which it was infested, their bodies thrown aside to rot in a trench, forgotten by the country they loved so much!

They could not see ahead, into the years, mark the shafts of marble raised to their honor, see the reverent homage paid to the unveiling of their simple names, in many a city and town far distant. The great heat, starvation and sickness had robbed them of the finer attributes of the mind, so that they could only suffer physically, and be dumb, where speech would accomplish nothing but an increase of torment.

One day, into the prison pen, a straggling band of soldiers came. And one of their number, a ragged, unshaven youth, separated himself from the rest and began to look searchingly around. The others jeered at him and mocked him.

"Tryin' to find an easy couch to lie on," one shouted hoarsely. "Look out, don't fall down over that Turkish rug," cried another, while still another voice supplemented quickly, "an' break the marble statoo —" referring, with a wave of one hand, to a guard on the dead line.

Heedless of their good-natured sarcasm, he continued his search, bending down here and there, to

peer curiously into the pallid faces of some of the prisoners who were too weak to rise. Suddenly he halted beside the emaciated form of a young man who was seated disconsolately on the ground, barefooted, the legs of his blue trousers tattered to the knees in rags that fluttered when he arose in response to the touch of a heavy hand on his shoulder.

"Well," he said wearily, as he beheld the stalwart figure near him, in faded blue, "I thought it was one of the guards, and that maybe—" a fierce light had dawned in his feverish eyes, "maybe they had come to tell me I was exchanged! What do you want?"

"Phil," a husky voice, vibrant with the tenderness of a mother to her child, rang in his ears. "Phil—don't you know me—Eph? Yes, you do—say you do—"

Sobs choked further utterance, but the newly arrived prisoner wound his arms around that emaciated figure, and kissed the cadaverous features again and again. Phil Marsh raised his eyes to the tear-wet face above his own.

"Am I dreaming?" he said dazedly, "or is this the next world? Eph, old fellow, if we are both dead I'm glad to see you," and he grasped the hand nearest him and wrung it heartily.

"You ain't dreamin', Phil," said Ephraim solemnly, for he perceived that starvation and the fever of the marshes had gotten into the young man's brain, and that his mind wandered momentarily, "we ain't dead, Phil. God knows, sometimes I wisht I was. Feel me, Phil, pinch me—that's right—oh, ouch, don't that hurt!" as Phil nipped a goodly piece of his flesh and blood arm, "yes I'm all here. Ben huntin' for you for months. Sorry I found you here though."

"So am I."

Gradually the light of reason was restored to Phil Marsh's eyes. He linked his arm in the sturdier one of Ephraim and suffered him to lead him a little apart from the rest, where they could talk by themselves. As they were passing one of the guard, Phil touched Ephraim lightly.

"Look out for that devil while you're here, Eph. He'd kill you or me on the slightest provocation. Take a sharp look at him and see if you recognize him in his new accoutrements."

"By gosh. Wal, I swan —" Ephraim gazed in open-mouthed wonder. "By the great horn spoon. How on airth did thet critter git here? Professor Hemilstross, by all the big injuns! Wal, I never. I'm clean beat, Phil. I thought thet ornery cuss was safe an' sound up in Canedy."

"Well, he isn't, as I know to my sorrow. But come along. Don't let him recognize you if you can help it. He'll do you mischief if you do. Come over here and sit down in the shade of this rock, and I will tell you how I happened to be in his company, Ephraim—" with a loving glance at the brawny shoulders beside his own. "I never was so glad to see any one in all my life."

"That's good."

Ephraim followed him, with one darting glance of mingled hatred and disgust at the stiff figure of the guard on the dead line.

"Git much to eat down here?" he drawled when they were seated.

"Nothing, Eph, but barely enough to keep you breathing, and the poorest quality, what my father would not throw to his swine. Some of the fellows here have ingeniously distilled whisky out of an old

boot leg. No —" as Ephraim cast an inquiring glance at his naked feet, "that isn't where mine are. I suspect mightily, that our friend, Hemilstross, at present rejoices in the possession of my last pair of whole infantry boots. Had a new pair on when I went into battle."

Ephraim darted lightning glances of hatred at the guard, unnoticed because his back was turned. Then he turned to Phil. "Tell me about it, Phil," he said, "I ain't very hungry yet. We had some pig swill before we started on the march, 'bout twenty-four hours ago."

"We'll get rations pretty soon," said Phil, looking up at the sun, then down again at the earth in the shadow of the great rock. "When the sun crosses that line," pointing to a deeply-graven mark in the sand, "we get our supper."

"Wal, it'll hev to fill the cavity, I 'spose," interposed Ephraim, "at least, I hope it will. Mine's pretty empty an' gittin' bigger an' bigger all the time," he added dubiously.

"Well," said Phil with an attempt at cheerfulness, "I'll do the talking for awhile and you the listening; and you see if you can't forget your 'aching void' while you listen to the recital of my exploits."

He had turned comforter now in the pleasure of the sight of one of the home faces, and he was boyishly happy in the presence of this faithful server in his father's house.

"Ye-us," drawled Ephraim, "tell us all about the battle, Phil. I call it mighty small pickin's though, to provide you with such quarters as this," glancing contemptuously around, "in payment for what you done."

"It isn't the fault of my commander," replied Phil soberly, "an unfortunate combination of circumstances brought me here. Well—" drawing a long breath, "now for my story. You see, I was impatient, when once I had enlisted, to be in action, and I was well pleased when orders came immediately for my regiment to go to the front. We camped in Washington two days, and during that time I saw Francis constantly, as our camps were practically one. Poor fellow! He chafed a good deal at the delay that was keeping him there, while I went straight to the scene of action. By the way, had the folks heard from him recently, when you left, Eph?"

He broke off abruptly to make this inquiry.

"Last letter they had, things were about the same," returned Ephraim stolidly, "an' there wan't much hope of his gittin' out o' Washington. By gosh, I wisht I was there, too."

Phil smiled as he resumed his narration.

"Of course you know the whole story of the battle; how hard won the victory was, and how we advanced and retreated, gained the heights where the enemy were entrenched and then fell back, nearly all day. I dreaded the battle, Eph, before it began. There I was, a young man, just in the dawn of manhood, all alive, well, and strong, tricked out in all the brand new finery Uncle Sam had furnished his soldiers. I tell you, I hated to think of the thing I should be when the battle was over, and they went around to gather up what might be left of us, and bury it all together, in a trench.

"But after the first gun was fired, when the great boom of the cannon began to fill my ears, my spirits began to rise, and as the battle waged thicker and faster, my blood grew hotter and hotter until I could

feel it boiling and rushing through my veins. I suppose it is the excitement that takes hold of a man at such times, but I threw caution to the winds and went in as hard as any of them, and I longed, Eph, I fairly longed to kill more men on the opposite side, than any of our company."

"I know," Ephraim nodded affirmatively, "I've ben there, Phil."

"When I saw their flag tremble, totter on its staff, I yelled wildly, once, twice, thrice, and dashed to the very centre of the ramparts which they were defending tooth and nail—I tell you, Eph, we fought men that day, not cowards—and we gained every inch by sheer force and power of resistance. Our color bearer made a brave dash and planted the flag where theirs had been."

Phil's eyes glowed reminiscently. Prison pen, stockade, dead line and guards all faded away, and he saw only the trampled heights, the silken banner rising and falling softly in the buoyant air. Ephraim was awed into silence for the moment by the enthusiasm of his manner.

"It was a grand sight. There she hung, old Glory, waving and blowing, the wind fanning her folds, the sunlight sparkling on her stars and kissing her azure field. Perhaps we weren't proud,—we just went mad! One great cheer, that they heard down below, where the fight was still raging, heard and answered, went up to the blue skies, and I think they must have heard it up there too, above the shot and shell, above the roar of cannon and musketry. I suppose we were too enthusiastic.

"A sudden shot took the color bearer right in the heart, and he went down, at my feet, without a groan. The flag went with him, and its folds spotless before,

trailed in his warm life blood. It was more than I could bear. With a yell, which I am sure must have resembled the screech of a fiend incarnate, for our throats were hoarse, full of dust and cracking for want of a drink, I rushed to his side and grasped the splintered staff from his hand. It was so confused, all about me such a hurrying, jostling mass, tangled like so many writhing, twisting, squirming snakes, that I could make no attempt to plant the flag; so I just stood there, stock still, and held it, stained with my comrade's life blood, and making of myself a target, at the same time, for a hundred guns. But I did not realize.

"Suddenly, I felt a sting in the arm that held the flag and it dropped, shattered, at my side. I tried to stand there, stiffly, and do my duty—the hurt was not much—but all at once, the struggling soldiers wavered and floated miles and miles away. The air all around grew dark and full of strange whispering noises, and then, I lost myself completely."

A little group of emaciated, hungry-eyed soldiers had gathered around the two young men. Phil, his dark eyes alight with the earnestness of his realistic story, had not noticed them. But now, in the little pause that came upon the speaker, they cheered weakly, and Ephraim nodded his head energetically.

"That's right, men," he cried, "ef I wasn't so durned hungry, I'd give em the battle cry, but I can't. I'm too gol blasted empty."

Phil flushed a little, but Ephraim nudged him with his elbow. "Go on," he urged him, "don't begrudge the poor fellers anythin' thet'll take their minds off'n their cussed appetites. Gosh dang it, I could eat a whole gobbler if I had one, an' Mis Marsh no need to cook 'im neither."

The rest of the men groaned in unison, and one of them made a motion as if to shoot Ephraim, while another remarked, "He deserves it, for mentionin' anythin' 'bout turkeys."

"Gracious — an' mince pies, too — shall I ever see another?" and one poor fellow, overcome by the thought, dropped down on the great rock, his face in his hands, sobbing bitterly.

"Wal, go on, Phil, — what happened to you then? I see I can't speak 'thout gittin' myself into trouble, consarn it," and Ephraim relapsed into rueful visaged silence.

"Well, the battle went on, all about me, after that, but I did not hear it. I suppose some of the comrades carried me back, out of the way of the firing line, because once or twice, when I came to enough to realize, I found that I was far from where I had received my wound. I lost a good deal of blood and lay in that state until far into the night. I suppose when they went around to pick up the wounded and carry them from the field, they passed me in some way. Perhaps they thought I was dead. But it was early morning when I was finally discovered, at the hour which was between the time for removing the wounded and burying the dead. You know what the ghouls of the battle-field are, don't you, Eph?" He turned abruptly to ask this question.

"You mean them critters that come back, after the battle, an' hunt an' molest the dead, so as to carry off, mebbe, some little thing they find on their bodies, a pair o' boots, or a watch or some little trinket? Wal, I guess, maybe, I do. When I was in the service, which I 'spose I ain't now," with a side glance at his rags, "we used to shoot 'em, — when we ketched 'em, that is."

"Yes, they are the ones I mean. Well, I had on a good pair of boots, and for those, this man whom I am telling you of, turned me over and woke me from my unconscious condition. When I came fully to myself, I was being carried, between two men, away from my own camp, miles and miles away, and when it was light enough so that I could see their faces, I learned that I was a prisoner of Professor Hemilstross."

Phil paused, with significant meaning, and Ephraim turned his eyes on the pacing figure on the dead line.

"Cuss him," he muttered viciously, "I'll git square with him yit."

"I'm afraid not." Phil smiled dolefully, "you see, Eph, there isn't any way to, here, and we won't have strength enough to, when we get out, if we ever do."

"That's so," growled Ephraim disconsolately, "Gosh dang it, how hungry I be," and he held his stomach with both hands, tightly.

"They carried me to some hospital or other, a poor place enough, and with what aid their surgeons gave me and my own good constitution, I managed to pull through after a good many weeks' suffering, without losing my arm. And then, Eph, this fellow Hemilstross approached me with a proposition."

"Ye-us," Ephraim's eyes had narrowed down to a vicious squint, and he breathed rapidly.

"He came to me one day, when I was nearly well, told me his story and made me his accursed offer. It seems that when he left Woodley Centre, he did not get so far as Canada, but was 'nabbed' when he reached Boston, and drafted into the service to fill the quota. He went into battle because he had to, but was captured as he was running away from one flank

of the enemy, directly into the arms of another. They brought him here, to this prison, and offered him his present situation, if he would renounce his allegiance to the old flag. He came to me with the same offer."

"What did you tell 'im, Phil?"

The eyes of Ephraim looked cruel as he asked this question.

"He said, Eph, that they had heard what a good fighter I was, and they wanted just such young and vigorous men in their service. If I would 'go over,' as he expressed it, I should be put in line at once for promotion. What did I tell him, Eph? Why, I just told him this—" the young man had risen to his feet now, in the excess of his emotion, and his voice swelled with the indignation the recital had renewed, "I told him what a cur, what a hound, I thought he was, that I had been wounded, almost died fighting for old Glory, and that if ever I got out of this, my first care would be to meet him in battle and put a bullet through his traitorous heart."

"And what did he say to that, Phil?" asked Ephraim with subdued excitement.

"He simply laughed and turned on his heel saying, 'You'll never get out of here only to go to a worse place.' The next day I was driven here."

"Wal, you just wait," said Ephraim with sudden conviction, "I'll fix him yet," and then ruminatively, "I 'spose he hates you, because you wan't a turncoat like him, an' he's allus hated me sence I shoveled him out of the snow one night, seems like ten year ago—but it ain't, Phil. It's only last winter. Wal, let him crow now—ef he wants to."

CHAPTER XX.

SOLOMON PENNY stood with one foot on the sunken doorstone of the Marsh home. "We won't make a bit o' noise, Ant Sarah, not a mite. We'll all come in keerful, jest speak to him an' then file out if you say so. But what we want is to meet him an' Uncle Abel at the town line, when the kerridge comes this way, an' 'scort 'em into town, honorably, as is befitin' a young feller thet done duty for his country. You've got two boys in the army, Mis Marsh," earnestly, "Phil, he's missin'. He fought an' we sh'll probably never hev the chance to take 'im by the hand an' say what we all feel. But Francis, he's comin' home — on a furlough — sick. I tell you, Ant Sarah, it takes as much of a man's courage to stan' what Francis 's done, an' lay nights in water an' days on the cold ground, jest waitin' to see what in tarnation they want ye to do, as it does to do what Phil hez, all in a minute. They's some excitement in that, but in the other there ain't anythin' but sheer, doggoned patience an' backbone, an' thet's why we want to git up this little jubilation, when they git back, termorrer, did you say?"

"Next day."

Sarah Marsh stood in the door, her arms akimbo, regarding her caller curiously. He returned the stare with interest.

"Wal," she said, finally, "if you want to meet the kerridge an' 'scort it to the house, I hain't no ob-

jections. But there hain't agoin' to be no band nor music, nor nothin' of that kind?" anxiously.

"Oh, no—we couldn't think o' that, an' him sick. We did want music, jest the fife an' drum corps from up to the Corners, but we all realized," laboriously, "thet he wan't in no condition to bear excitement. So we're jest goin' to march—we stay-at-homes—" deprecatingly, "to the town line an' come up to the house with 'em. An' then, ez I suggested, we'll all file in, still as mice, Ant Sarah, an' shake his hand, an' out agin. He needn't speak, nor nothin' an' he can go to bed if he wants to, 'fore we come in."

"All right." Sarah Marsh nodded approvingly. "I dessay he'll be able to see you all. It'll set him up wonderful to git home, an' I guess he'll like to hev you come an' meet him. But mind now—Mr. Penny—" and she looked him squarely in the eye, "you'll be the man I shall depend on to see that there ain't no noise."

"You sartinly can," he assured her solemnly, and then, as he turned away into the gloaming of the early twilight, "you know, he's the first real returned soldier we've had here in town. The three months men didn't really count, cause we all thought the war'd be over an' forgot before this. Wal, good-bye, Mis Marsh. S'long," and with a low bow he passed out of the dooryard.

It had touched Sarah Marsh to learn that the people of her native village desired to make her son's homecoming an occasion of mild celebration, but her first thought was for him and his comfort. She called Hope into consultation and together they planned for the entertainment of the guests.

"I hate to ask you, Hope," the elder woman said, stroking softly the glistening waves of the girl's sunny hair, as she sat on a low stool at her feet, "but I 'spose somebody's got to let Margaret know an' ask her to be here for the party. It's so long sence I've wrote a letter, thet I sh'd be sure to say somethin' I hadn't ought to, an' 'Scilla, she couldn't write two lines an' spell 'em kerect. I guess," regretfully, "you'll hev to do it."

Hope looked up to her brightly.

"Anything I can do for you, or," slowly, "him, I am only too glad to do. I'll go right off now and do it," and she sprang to her feet and went to the old-fashioned secretary in one corner of the room.

"Yes, best do it now," echoed Sarah Marsh, "sooner you git a disagreeable job off'n your hands the better off you be."

Presently Hope returned with the note in her hand.

"Will this do?" she asked.

"Dear Miss Gardner: Could you make us a little visit to celebrate the occasion of Francis' return from Washington? We thought it would be more cheerful for him to have all his friends about, and should like to have you come by tomorrow surely.

"SARAH MARSH,

By Hope Hamilton, *Secretary*."

"I have put that on, 'Secretary,'" she said, laughingly, "so she will not wonder that I assume so many liberties."

"You're a good soul, Hope." Sarah Marsh regarded her with moistened eyes, "a good soul," she repeated tenderly as she went about her work.

'Scilla's strong arm was called into requisition, and all the next day, pies, cakes, brown and white bread, puddings, and fowl prepared to roast, went into the brick oven.

"Francis hain't had no Thanksgivin' this year," said his mother, thoughtfully, "an' even if he can't eat this one, 'twill do him a sight o' good to see the others eat. I do hope he won't be too tired to stan' so much."

"We will spare him all we can," suggested Hope, "and I know it will please him." That afternoon Margaret Gardiner arrived, resplendent in a gown of plaid silk, in soft violet and golden tints over a hoop-skirt of larger dimensions than any inhabitant of Woodley Center had yet adopted, and bound, as Sarah Marsh expressed it, to "make the rest of 'em stan' round." A wide skirted coat, of richest black velvet, finished off her costume appropriately and elegantly, while her bonnet of rose-colored "drawn" silk, set off the marble-like pallor of her skin, the rich tints of her brown hair and the fathomless eyes to perfection.

She moved about, in her accustomed stately way, gracious to all, yet removed, and preserving ever so delicately the gossamer barrier she herself had erected between her personality and that of these plain country people. No one thought of troubling her for the slightest services Hope performed constantly, she did not offer and it was patent to all that her matrimonial intentions did not include the family of the man to whom she had given her heart. Yet she was not ungenerous.

Deeply solicitous for the welfare of her lover, she was prepared in all ways to make this home-coming for him a real welcome. Following her arrival

came a great basket of fruits of the tropics, which she had been to some trouble to secure, at that season of the year; but such attentions could not be construed to extend, even remotely, to the other members of his family.

To Hope she was courteous, gently patronizing, but to the sharpened senses, it was patent that she tolerated her because of the brotherly affection with which she was still regarded by Francis.

Soon after the midday meal, some of the women of the neighborhood began to drop in, "to keep you comp'ny, Mis Marsh," they said. The train would not be due at the nearest station, the great structure of a neighboring city, until after three. At a little past that hour, those who were looking out of the window, saw the little procession of townsmen file past the house, in a double line, headed by Nathan Drake and Solomon Penny, each stiffly attired in his best black suit of broadcloth, as befitted the dignity of the occasion. It was only a short walk past the house, to the town line, and the time seemed very brief before the line of march set toward retreat and two by two the escorting members of the village's best society came into sight.

Following at a walk came two horses drawing a hack, and as it drew up at the front gate the ranks of the marching broke suddenly, formality shed itself like an ill-fitting garment, and the escorting committee crowded indecorously about the door of the vehicle. Abel Marsh stepped out first, florid, bluff, and hearty as when he went away.

"Wal, how be ye?" he called, gruffly, "glad to see ye. I'm glad you're all come to help me git Francis out, I swan if I ain't now, — not that he weighs so heavy that it'll take all on ye to lift him,"

and he went off into a hearty guffaw which had the effect of reassuring Sarah Marsh who stood, outwardly calm, in the doorway, surrounded by a group of anxious faced women.

From the dim interior of the hack, a pallid hand reached out and grasped the side of the door. But before he had time to place one foot on the step of the carriage, the young man inside was lifted out by strong and willing hands, and borne, laughing and expostulating, up the path and placed on the top step by his mother's side. One anxious look she bestowed on him and then grasped his hand closely.

"Wal, how be ye, Francis?" she asked quietly, as she followed him into the parlor where a roaring fire had been kindled and the big easy chair drawn up before it, for his reception.

"All right, now, Mother," he called out, cheerily, "I'm at home again and I feel like a new man already. You here too, Margaret? Why, it seems that all my good things come together. And you too, Hope."

He sank into the cosy depths of the great soft chair happily, and his face looked very pale against the blackness of its upholstery. But he had a friendly greeting for all who had gathered quietly about him, took them all by the hand and spoke cheerily to them. Margaret constituted herself his chief attendant, anticipating all his wants and hurrying here and there to execute every petty command he issued, so Hope withdrew to the big sitting-room which had been fitted up as the banquet-room, and with the aid of 'Scilla and some of the neighborhood women, began to make ready for the entertainment of the guests.

When all was ready, Francis called out gaily, "Now I am going to be toastmaster of this occasion.

Ask some of these brawny fellows to just put my chair in the sitting-room door, the one opening off from the hall, Margaret, if you will, and then, the rest of you sit down where I can see you, and eat. I'm a trifle exhausted from my long ride, but I will levy extortion on the viands, as my whim suggests, and when I call for anything see to it that I get it right off, please. Remember, good people, I have been waiting on myself for a long while, and the greatest boon you can bestow on me is to let me have my own way, and be idle."

This raised a hearty laugh.

John Dale, unaccompanied by the snapping whip, and Solomon Penny carried the great chair to the doorway, and Francis, leaning on the arm of the girl he had chosen for his wife, followed slowly. When he was seated, they all filed past him to the table.

"We'll miss John," he remarked, a trifle soberly, "he always asked the blessing, you know."

"Nathan," Abel Marsh indicated Selectman Drake with a wave of his hand, "you'll do it, won't you?" and at once, Nathan Drake arose in his place at the head of the table, and while the others sat with bowed heads, asked the divine blessing on the food they were to eat, on the young soldier whose homecoming had given them all so much joy, and on the absent son, of whose whereabouts they were ignorant, as well as the "faithful serving man who had gone in search of him."

Perhaps the words might have sounded a trifle stilted and far fetched, to a disciple of the purest forms of speech, but they came from the honest, earnest heart of a gentleman of the old school and were received as far beyond their capabilities by his simple hearted neighbors.

Then the good things were disposed of, amid subdued jollity, for they had not come to commiserate the home-comer, but to draw his thoughts from the contemplation of saddening things, and he, reading their good intentions in their manner, fell in with all their well meant merriment, and helped it along. As the dinner proceeded, he called for one thing after another, and Margaret or Hope made haste to serve him. First it was a little chicken "just a taste," then pudding and cake and pie; but the watchful eyes of Sarah Marsh noted that it was only a pretence of eating he made, and her heart sank like lead, as once or twice, his hollow cough sounded above the hum of voices.

When all had finished eating, he called to his father, "Got any sweet cider, Father? Not the kind that intoxicates, but the pure juice of the fruit, sweet and unfermented?"

"Wal," deliberately, "I'll see. It's kinder late, but I guess it ain't very ha'sh yet."

He rose slowly from the table, went into the pantry where he secured a monster pitcher of yellow ware, and presently they heard his heavy footfalls on the cellar stairs. Meanwhile, Hope and 'Scilla were placing glasses on the table.

"Them's my Lafayette goblets," volunteered Sarah Marsh in an explanatory tone, as the first dozen were produced, "they were struck off when La Fayette" she called it Lay, "come here on a visit, let's see, 'twas in twenty-five, I think. They was my mother's."

"Oh, my!" Solomon Penny's wife took up one of the goblets, gingerly, "you must be an awful keerful washer, Mis Marsh, or you'd broke 'em."

"I never did — or these —" as Hope set down some thick goblets near her. "Them are my cable glasses, struck off when the Great Eastern laid the Atlantic cable. You see this big ridge, like a rope," and she rubbed it softly with one finger, "wal, that's the cable. We can all remember when that happened. Tain't so long ago."

Just then Abel Marsh came into the room with the pitcher full of cider. "There," he said, breathlessly, "that ain't sour a mite, an' it's ben made a couple o' months, good, — or more."

Francis looked up with his ready smile.

"And now, as master of ceremonies," he called, "I shall make the toasts, remaining seated, because, to tell the truth, my limbs still tremble from the jolting of the train, and I feel better this way. Those who are called upon, will oblige the chair, by responding as their names are called. First, as appropriate to this occasion, I shall suggest, my country, under a cloud at present, but like the sun, incapable of being quenched. Mr. Nathan Drake," with a courtly bow in the direction of his father's old friend.

Mr. Drake arose in his place, his glass brimming and made an eloquent response to the toast suggested, touching upon the situation of the present, as he beheld it, and prophesying a glorious peace and reconciliation for the near future. All present took a sip from their glasses, in response, in honor of this toast, after touching them to those of their nearest neighbor, and the click, click, sounded merrily in the silence of the room.

"For the second toast," again the voice of Francis Marsh pierced the stillness, "I propose the name of my brother, Phil Marsh, a hero, missing

from his home and his regiment, but always present in our heart of hearts. Miss Hope Hamilton."

With flushed cheeks and shining eyes, Hope arose and related simply the conversation she had held with Phil only a few days before his departure, paid a glowing tribute to his heroism and sat down amid subdued applause.

"The third toast, to all of our absent friends, — especially John Sherburne and his wife, with us, I doubt not, in spirit, though absent in body. John Dale, who always swore our friend would come out ahead of us all."

John Dale arose in response to this, flicked an imaginary fly from his boot heel, hemmed and hawed, said, "Friends an' feller citizens: I can only repeat what Francis says I hev already said, and add to it that I think now, his wife'll come out ahead of him every time, — women allus do, when they take a notion to give us a race," and sat down.

"He who has gone in search of the lost, brave as a lion, gentle as a calf, — Ephraim Binks. 'Scilla Higgins, who should know his good qualities, if he has any."

There was a great burst of merriment at this, amid which 'Scilla rose, her face redder than the reddest peony, stammered, "Now, Francis, you're too bad, I do declare! An' I ain't agoin' to say one word, now." She dropped into her seat with a suddenness that set all the glasses to jingling.

"Sometimes," Nathan Drake raised his eyebrows a trifle, "silence is more eloquent than words."

Then they all laughed again. In the hush that followed, Francis proposed, "our mothers and our sweethearts. Without the first we should never have lived, and I cannot see how we exist for any length

of time without the latter. Abel Marsh, who, having had both, should be an authority."

The ruddy face of Farmer Marsh rose like a great, round, cherry-colored moon above the row of countenances about the table.

"Wal," he said, pensively, "seein' as I had your mother for my sweetheart, I dunno but you're right," and sat down amid a sudden clapping of hands.

Sarah Marsh looked anxiously across the table at her son. Was he taxing his strength, was this gayety fictitious, or was he really better now that he was at home? Nathan Drake noting her expression, rose and proposed adjournment. "I think it will do our young soldier more good," he suggested, "than anything we can do."

The motion was carried unanimously.

"We've got a little gift for ye, Francis," said Solomon Penny approaching him, "but we ain't a goin' to make no reglar presentation, an' we don't want no speech from you. You've done enough. We'll all shake hands with you an' wish you well an' then file out o' the house an' when I come to ye, I'll jest hand what we've got to you. They've all seen it an' I promised Ant Sarah I'd see that there wan't too much noise. Soon's we're gone, you go right to bed. Come on all, for one handshake an' good-bye."

One by one they filed past him, shook his hand and whispered a word of encouragement. He looked up at each one and smiled with expressive eyes, but it was plain that he had reached the limit of his endurance. When Solomon Penny passed him he dropped in his hand a closed case.

"There," he said, hoarsely, "I hope you'll like it."

"Many thanks," returned Francis, and silently, one by one, old neighbors and friends, went past until at last the house was cleared of all save his own family. Then he opened the case.

With a little start of pleased surprise he held it out to his mother. "See, Mother," he said, "and his lip trembled, "would you have believed it of them? I do not deserve it. They are far too kind," and he raised his hand to brush away a tear.

On its bed of purple velvet lay a beautiful gold watch, the inner case engraved with his name, regiment, company, and the date. When all had admired it sufficiently, his mother said abruptly, "You're goin' to bed, now, Francis. You'll hev time enough to-morrow to look at it an' visit with the girls."

"All right," and he rose obediently from his chair, "but my watch is going with me. Good-night, Margaret, Hope, Father. Come, Mother, come along and get my room ready. You'll have to tuck me in tonight, same as you used to, when I was little and afraid of the dark," and leaning on her strong arm, he passed from the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE cold months passed slowly away, but all looked forward to the approaching spring-time as the rejuvenating period that should bring to Francis Marsh an increase of energy and healthfulness. For a while after his return he drooped visibly. Then followed a short period of improvement which alternated with those frequently recurring strengthless spells, after each of which he seemed to have lost something of the natural elasticity of his constitution. But he was always patient, cheery, and courageous.

His bitter disappointment he had hidden away from his friends, to spare them any share in his own feelings on the matter. All his brightest dreams of an honorable career of service to his country, and perhaps well-merited promotion, had faded away under the canvas of the little tent in the camp at Washington, as he realized that he was growing, day by day, less fitted for the service he so ardently desired. It was the greatest sorrow of his lifetime. His was the true, patriotic nature, which, placing love of country before all else, ignores possible hardships and injuries, feeling only within the loyal breast, the undeniable call to duty and the thrilling of a love that is higher than all human affections.

There was no thought for him of what he must give up, what he must leave behind. His country's call for aid was imperative, and the only thing he required was strength to do her bidding. Curiously enough, this was the very thing that had been denied

him; and a far greater tax on his heroism had been the lonely hours on his soldiers' cot, waiting for the strength that would not come, than the marching orders or the fierce challenge of the enemy, which so many really brave men have dreaded.

Then, after his return home, had come the revivification of hope and the cherished plans for a return to his regiment and his ambitions. For a long time he had fed these imaginings, but gradually, as the winter passed, he had realized that a miracle was needed to accomplish his return in anything like the time he had specified for himself.

Still, he was not disheartened. Here, as elsewhere, the wonderful patience and gentleness of his nature proved of what fine material it was composed, and his unbounded cheerfulness brought closer to him, and held them, the hearts of all who had a part in his daily life. The similarity between his nature and that of his mother, the subtle sympathy, comprehended by neither, yet always present, rendered words not always necessary to a perfect understanding of congenial thoughts.

At many times they would sit in the wide sitting-room, surrounded by its homely furnishings, she, always at the southern window, where she sewed or knit, when not employed at household tasks, he comfortably disposed in the capacious depths of the big easy-chair near the crackling wood stove and talk for hours, till the spent sunlight slowly reddened the western sky, about the past days, the present, and the future. She was calm, even minded, hopeful, and unemotional. He, her own son, with rather more of the father's impulsiveness about him. But neither mentioned the great fear that sometimes wrung the hearts of both.

One day, it was a February day, when little glints of burnished gold gave hints of the reawakening of nature to the newer life, he expressed a wish to his mother to see Hope.

"But you do see her," she returned, peeking up at him queerly over the rim of her spectacles, "every day, mostly."

"I know, — but I want her to come here some afternoon, just for a few hours, and I want to see her alone. There is something I want to say to her and — and —" he hesitated, looked away across his mother's face, out of the southern window, where the clouds were piled up in great masses of brilliant gold and purple, and continued, "well, you know, it would be just as well, Mother, to get all our little affairs attended to in time," slowly, "you know it makes no difference really, to the duration of a man's life if he does make his will a little too soon, — before it becomes a necessity. I want all these things to be straightened out. I feel that only a clear and full explanation, such as we have never had, would satisfy either Hope or myself and — I want to see her."

"You shall."

There was an unaccustomed seriousness in the face of Sarah Marsh as she rose to put away the heavy coat on which she had been working. Then she turned about in the gloaming, and the light from the window, at her back, full of mingled tints of gold and violet, fell over her countenance, bringing out to the eyes of the young man watching her, all its rugged grandeur of feature and expression, and softening the lines suffering and disappointment had written there.

"Francis," she said, softly, "didn't you never think p'raps, that mebbe, you might hev made a mistake 'bout Hope? P'raps after all, she's the one you really cared 'bout."

His eyes fell from the level of her face to the floor.

"No, Mother, I am perfectly sure."

His voice sounded grave and solemn in the deepening shadows. "There is a fine difference, a distinction, I can hardly explain myself, between the woman a man loves in one way, and the one he loves in another. Many a man has mistaken the one sort of affection for the other, and passed a perfectly miserable life in consequence. Things are coming to my sight more clearly lately, and I am convinced, that if I had it all to do over again, I should do it just the same. There is one love for the woman I shall marry, if I get well, a love that is irresistible, that cannot be gainsaid nor ignored, a love that has some divine attraction for its origin, I am sure, and another, for the sweet, sisterly girl who will always have a warm place in my heart. But my love for Hope is that of a brother for his sister, it is strong, pure, and true, but it is not, nor could it ever have grown into the love I have for Margaret."

It was their one point of difference. She could not discover the intangible divisions he made between the spiritual and the moral affections of his heart, and she had no phrases of learned sophistry with which to answer his arguments, so she was wisely silent.

The next day a message from her brought Hope to the old farmhouse. She came in, in the early afternoon, flushed and almost breathless, from her long walk against the wind, which was blowing with true March bluster; but the ever ready smile lighted her face.

"You see I came," she said, "in spite of the wind. It seems like a real March day outside, only there are those little rifts in the clouds I always like to see, they

are so blue, like violets in a snow drift," she finished, suddenly.

"Yes, ain't they?"

Sarah Marsh bustled about, cheered by the presence of the girl, put extra wood on the fire and opened all the drafts.

"It seems somethin' like spring, even if it is so cold an' blusterin' out. I tell Francis, it'll soon pass away, an' after March is gone, we sh'll look for some brighter weather. There—" closing the drafts of the great stove suddenly with a loud noise, "the fire's all right, an' if it ain't, there's plenty of wood in the wood-box, Hope, an' you can jest pile it in till you're warm enough. I'm agoin' up to the old toll house, to Mis Dale's, for a few minutes, mebbe an hour or so, an' mebbe I sh'll stay most of the afternoon. She's got a quilt into the frames an' wanted me to come over an' help her tie it. So you'n Francis can amuse yourselves, I guess."

"All right, Mother. Go along. And don't mind us. I rather think, Hope," he smiled knowingly, "that she planned this quilting party with an eye to getting rid of the responsibility of my care for a little while, and as long as you are here," with a whimsical accent, "why, you'll just have to make the best of it and endure my society alone."

"Sho!" his mother laughed good-naturedly, "it ain't no sech thing. I ain't tired of him a bit. Only I thought 'twould be a good time fer me to keep my promise to Mis Dale now, as any time."

"Why, certainly."

A little embarrassment showed itself in the faint flush that tinted Hope's cheek, but she presently continued, "Only, before you go, I have some news for you. John Sherburne and Laura came home last

night. He has been discharged, well, — but he can never fight again. He has come home like a good many others, with an empty sleeve."

The girl's earnest voice rang gravely out in the stillness that followed her announcement, a stillness that was broken by the voice of Sarah Marsh exclaiming:

"Sho! How you talk! I'm awful sorry. I wish though, 'twas Phil come home, arms or no arms. I'd be right glad."

"Dear old Phil! Where is he? And John too — I am glad for his sake, it is no worse." Francis sighed softly, reminiscently.

"You should see Laura," Hope's voice had now a note of exultation in it, "she is fairly radiant. She declares she will be arms, head, anything he may require. I saw them both last night. He is to go right on with his studies, her father and mother have opened their arms and their home to him, until such a time as he is ordained and can afford a home of their own. And she —" Hope lingered tenderly over the word, "she will be his inspiration."

"True," assented Francis, softly, "I am amazed too, that he should have lost his arm. There was no question of that when I saw him in Washington. But then, there was so much confusion and misunderstanding that I may have been misinformed."

"They are going to have a jollification for him tomorrow night, in the schoolhouse. Every one is going to attend. I was commissioned to bring the invitations here," with an inquiring glance at Mrs. Marsh.

"No, tain't no use. Francis ain't agoin' to expose himself goin' out no such weather as we're having now. John'll hev to come here to see him. He hain't

got but one arm, but it won't hurt the well one any to go out, an' it's different with Francis."

"Hear! Hear!" and he clapped his hands softly. "So, you'll have to tell them, Hope, that I am a prisoner of war, and they must come here if they see me." He smiled up at her brightly and Hope laughingly said, "All right."

"Wal, I guess I'll git along up towards Mis Dale's, so's to be back in time for supper. Good-bye," and Sarah Marsh turned away from the homely room with its cheerful firelight and went out into the blustering wind, her hands folded tightly under her long shawl and a knitted hood pulled well over her face.

Francis settled himself comfortably in his chair and looked up at Hope who had seated herself in the square-backed wooden rocker his mother always occupied.

"Do you know," he asked her slowly, his eyes following every curve of her gracefully poised head, silhouetted against the window where the afternoon sun was brightly shining, "that I have but just read 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' — finished it this morning? I must confess to a good deal of remissness, since Father bought the book when it first came out, over ten years ago, is it not? But it always seemed to escape me. You have read it?" with an inquiring glance.

"Oh, yes. And you —" slowly turning her eyes to him, "did you like it?"

"It only brought back all the old fever, all the old desire," passionately, and with an intonation that caused Hope to look up in sudden surprise, "Hope, where do you suppose Phil is today?"

A saddened look crossed the girl's face.

"I don't know. It is terrible, isn't it?"

"Nights, when I am awake, and there are many of them when I do not sleep, I lie and wonder where he is. On some battle-field, fighting perhaps, for the cause again, but if that were so, he would have found a way to let us know. Dead perhaps, thrown away with countless others, not even numbered, or maybe, in some Southern prison, sick, suffering, starving. There are nights sometimes, when I try to reach him through the darkness, when I throw out my arms and whisper, 'Phil, if it is possible, give me some sign—something to tell me whether you are here, or there. Just a word, a look, an impression, the faintest feeling. I know I could interpret it—,' but nothing ever comes of it, nothing but blackness and darkness—and despair. I do not talk of these things to my mother, Hope, for I know that her heart is bearing its heavy load, uncomplainingly, and I would not add to that burden by one sigh of mine. I tell you, because—in the months—" he hesitated and then continued, "yes, weeks that are perhaps to come, she will need your fullest sympathy, your kindest care, and Hope, I bespeak in advance, what I know you will not refuse."

She raised her eyes and the light from the window sparkled on a tear that had wet her lashes.

"Do you mean, Francis?" she asked him, brokenly.

"You have guessed it," calmly, "and you must be brave. Oh, Hope—," he reached out one hand to her and she crossed the room and sat down on a low stool beside him, where the ruddy glow of the fire-light flashed across the warm tints of her hair, commingling and brightening them. Presently he went on speaking, in a low rapid tone.

"Must I always be the one to ask, you to grant? You to give, and I selfishly to take? You have been

more than a sister to me, sunny, bright, and cheerful, when most I need encouragement, but you must see, what I have known—oh, for weeks—,” he smiled sadly, “that I am gaining no ground. The doctor does not give my parents the slightest encouragement, yet they hope against hope, that the coming of warm weather will bring back my vanished strength. You see now, do you not, Hope, why I wanted so much to have Phil, honest, brave, tender-hearted Phil, with them?”

The girl sat with bowed head, but a slight motion gave the assent he asked.

“It is not that I dread so much to go, Hope, though life itself is very sweet,—but a brave soldier always obeys the command of his superior officer, and having received summons from the Great Commander, I shall not shrink nor falter; but I dread, yes, I am afraid to leave those behind who I know are in nowise prepared for the blow. Hope, you have been like a dear sister to me. You will be their daughter when they are alone and childless,—when they have no sons?”

Slowly the girl raised her face so that her eyes looked into his. They had been wet and tear-stained but were calmly shining now.

“Yes, Francis,” she said gently, quietly, “if the time comes when they need me, I shall not be found wanting. But I, too, am hopeful. I do not believe it is so bad. We shall hope for what the spring will bring and,” a new light dawned in her eyes, “I know, I am sure that Phil will come home.”

“I am going to try to believe that, too. But the other—,” and he shook his head, “I know you will all have hope and I shall, but when I see that with all the kind care and nursing and loving attention that I

have, I am going steadily backward, I can also see, Hope, that the enemy is as steadily advancing. You have been to me everything in our short lives, — playmate, sweetheart, friend, and now at last, when there is perfect understanding between us, my well loved sister. You are brave, Hope, I know that, by the sweetness and patience of your daily life, and to you, of all others in the world, have I entrusted this burden whose weight, when I bore it alone, was well-nigh crushing."

"I am glad," the girl spoke simply, sweetly, "that you have so trusted me. I am glad I may still be your sister, your friend. And since this is a heart to heart talk, with no dissimulation, no hiding of what we feel, I will be as frank with you as you have been with me. It was hard, desperately hard, for me to take the place you gave me, at first, hard to see another occupying the place that had been mine; but I have learned a good deal, in the months of trial that have come to us all in the recent past, learned to bear much I thought I could not bear, to hope for much that seemed hopeless, and to appreciate what I was once indifferent to. I hope it may all come right some time in the future, and I want you to believe that I have accepted the inevitable as cheerfully as was possible. Of course it is hard to break off old ties, all at once, and for me, there will never be new ones; but I have tried, for your sake, and I believe I have succeeded."

They talked long and earnestly after this, till graying shadows crept out of the farthest corners and flung themselves writhing at their feet. Gradually and tactfully, Hope led his thoughts away from the troublous themes his mind had dwelt on, cleared away the cobwebs of his doubt, and banished the

gloomy forebodings that too much self-centered brooding had fostered. He had been telling her, with many a laughing comment and characteristic gesture, some of his experiences of camp life when, glancing out of the window, and far away up the hill, she caught sight of two figures coming slowly into view. When he had finished speaking, she turned to him with a merry smile.

"I see two figures coming down the slope of the hill, and I think I recognize them. Yes, they are coming here—," and she rose and stood expectantly at the window.

"I know who it is," Francis laughed, happily, "you do not need to tell me. I can feel their beneficent presence already. John and Laura, are they not?"

Hope nodded gayly and ran to unfasten the front door.

"Come right in," she cried, gladly, kissing her friend affectionately, "here he is—in here."

She drew them into the sitting-room and paused with one on either hand, in front of Francis.

"Here are your friends," she said, proudly, "Captain John Sherburne and wife."

Francis looked up quickly.

"I am glad," he said, and there was the true ring to his voice, "come, take some seats, and tell me all about it."

John Sherburne smiled gravely. "I am a little awkward yet," he said, "but I shall get used to it in time. Sometimes, I think my own awkwardness was the cause of my getting wounded. If I had been more agile perhaps, less like a grave old fossil—," with a side glance at the beaming face of his wife. She shook her finger at him reprovingly.

"He will insist on that," she said, "thinks his promotion was all a mistake, and that the loss of his arm was well-merited punishment for some lack of attention of his own. Anyway," and she held out two prettily gloved hands, "he has three now."

"Then he cannot complain," Francis laughed heartily, "most men have but two. But John is too conscientious. You must rid him of that quality, make him feel a little less responsible for his own misdemeanors by putting some of your own on to his shoulders. "Hope," turning to her suddenly, with the old compelling smile, "may I ask these people to stay to tea with me?"

"Wait. I'll look in the pantry."

She ran away laughing and presently returned. "Yes, I think you may," she said, "there are half a dozen pumpkin pies, two great sheets of gingerbread, a lot of cold meat, and 'Scilla is making apple sauce in the kitchen, while she sings the 'Indian Warrior,' at the same time."

"Is that the noise I heard? Why, I imagined the wind had changed and there was rain in the air. I was just going to ask John to look out and see what the sky portended."

They all laughed merrily, and presently, when Sarah Marsh came slowly in through the kitchen into the sitting-room, she found them all there, chatting interestedly, and Francis, with brightened eyes and cheerful countenance, laughing heartily at some quaint saying of Laura's; so she passed on her way into the parlor bedroom, to lay aside her hood and shawl, with lightened spirits.

CHAPTER XXII.

“HEY, you, Yank!”
Ephraim Binks looked up from the particular furrow in the ground he had been stolidly contemplating, as the sound of a familiar voice fell on his ear. Professor Hemilstross had paused, imperceptibly, almost, in his steady tramp, and was regarding Ephraim fixedly.
“No, you don’t,” muttered Ephraim, doggedly, “that ’ere game won’t work with me. I ain’t agoin’ within no gunshot distance o’ thet varmint.”

“What you talking about, Eph?”

Phil Marsh lolled indolently on the ground nearby, weak, emaciated, and hungry eyed, but at the sound of Ephraim’s apparently objectless mutterings, he had turned toward him.

“Why, that cuss—,” viciously, “up thar—hez called out to me, an’ wants to talk ter me. An’” with an air of settled conviction, “I ain’t a goin’ no nearer to him than I be now, — not if I knows myself. I want to git whar I can hev another chance at him, somewhar, whar I can hev full swing, — not be shot down here, like a cur, for disobeyin’ of some consarned order or other. I’ve fought mighty shy o’ him, sence I’ve ben here, an’ I mean to, the rest o’ the time. He’s only waitin’ for me to do somethin’ so’s he can pepper me.”

“That’s so,” assented Phil, wearily, “see, he is making motions to you. Can’t you stay right here and find out what he wants?”

"I know, well enough," Ephraim laughed, mirthlessly, a disheartening sound in Phil's ears. "He wants to find out somethin' 'bout 'Scilla—an'," bitingly, "I ain't agoin' to tell him."

"I wouldn't vex him needlessly, Eph," urged Phil, "God knows, we've got enemies enough in this heaven-forsaken hole. And—," desperately, a strange, haunting light springing up in his fevered eyes, "we've been here so long that it almost seems, to me, at least, as if there were not any other earth—or heaven—or even hell—," he concluded savagely.

Ephraim poked a little pile of dirt together with his finger, before he replied.

"Lost your faith in hell, eh?" he asked, hoarsely. "I tell you, Phil, there is a hell—an' it's right here—at least that's what I've made up my mind. No—I ain't a comin'," shaking his fist savagely at the beckoning hand just outside the dead line. Let's see, Phil, how long hez it ben sence we was in this accursed hole?"

"Well, it was some time in the fall, Eph, when we came, and it is now spring. I have lost all count of the days; all the hours even, are alike here."

"'Cept the ones thet bring us grub," murmured Ephraim, "my, I tell you, Phil, this hotel's great on vittles. Mis Marsh wouldn't thrown my breakfast this morning to the hogs, an' if she had, they wouldn't of eaten it. I et it all—with one swaller," he concluded ruminatively.

"Hey, you!" Again the voice from the dead line rang out, as its owner paced steadily by, with his gun over his shoulder. "I want to ask you something. You can come up nearer, a little. I shan't fire,—got my orders not to, 'less you cross the dead line. You needn't be afraid," scornfully.

"I aint." Ephraim raised his voice to reply. "Cayn't you talk jest as well where I be? I can't walk very well. Et too much breakfast, I guess."

"It's too far."

"It'll hev to do," carelessly, "you might fergit yourself, you know, an' I might," suggestively, "say somethin' you didn't like."

"I only want to ask you a few questions about my friends in Woodley Centre. How were they all, when you came away?"

A little group of ragged soldiers had gathered near, at the unaccustomed spectacle of one of their number conversing on familiar subjects, with a guard of the dead line, and a gentle breeze that had sprung up, fluttered the tatters of their uniforms, like the draperies of a scare-crow.

"Wal," Ephraim looked up from the little sand fort he was building, and bawled his reply loudly, "they wan't any on 'em mournin' much 'bout your de-par-ture."

A low murmur of laughter from the onlookers followed this, but Professor Hemilstross, nothing daunted, ventured another inquiry.

"And my friends, the Marshes, how are they all?"

"Wal, Phil's here," nonchalantly, "I guess he'd be pretty likely to answer for himself, if he had half a chance, — an' as fer the rest on 'em, I dunno's that's any o' your consarned business."

This raised another laugh, and the professor looked thunderous.

"Look out," he threatened.

"I be," returned Ephraim, calmly, gazing over the head of the guard, at the blue sky outside the stockade.

"You know what I wanted to ask you." Professor Hemilstross turned on his steady beat and came tramping back toward the line of Ephraim's vision. "The girl — how did she take it — my going away?" ('Conceited puppy!') murmured Phil, "and how is she — married yet — consoled herself with you, perhaps?" sarcastically. He had been waiting since their entrance into the prison pen for this chance to harass Ephraim, and his cruel eyes gloated over the ragged, hungry soldier, sitting on a little mound of dirt beneath their level.

"No — she hain't yit," Ephraim hurled the words at him, one by one, like hot shot, "I hain't gin her the chance yit. P'raps —," slowly, "when you git home from the war, hevin' distinguished yourself in the line of thief an' traitor, she'll look twice at ye, even if ye did run off to git rid of the draft."

A hoarse cheer agitated the throats of the men near him, though they knew it redoubled their chances of disaster. It is but natural for a man to hate a coward and a traitor, and some of the other guards who were near enough to hear and understand, looked significantly at the professor and then at each other. He snarled like a vicious cur and fell to tramping again, scowling darkly.

"'s thet all?" called Ephraim after him, "'cause if it ain't, there's plenty more whar that come from. P'raps you'd like to hev me tell these gentlemen," with a wave of his hand toward the fluttering rags of his comrades, "'bout the night I shoveled you out of the snow drift, — or when I put ye out of Solomon Penny's store?"

There was no response. The guard paced steadily back and forth across the dead line, and a little silence fell on the groups of soldiers huddled about the pen.

"I guess you've done it now, Eph," suggested Phil after a little, "you'll have to look out or you'll never have a chance at him in the open."

"By gosh—I guess that's so," muttered Ephraim, ruefully, "I'll bet he picked on me, on purpose, so's I'd say somethin' that'd give him a chance at me. Wal—," stoically, "I've done it, I guess."

"I shouldn't wonder," returned Phil, "but it is no use to cry for spilt milk. Only, if there had been a chance for us to flee this place, it's gone up now."

"Wal, we can't help it now,—consarn him! I just wish we could git outside this, an' by gravy, I don't know but I'll find a way yet."

"I am afraid not." Phil shook his head sadly.

For weary months, terrible in their monotony, had they lain here, among the slow torturing and disease wrecking of their companions, and counted the minutes, almost, in their impatience to be free. No word of home, no message from friends could reach them, and they knew they were as dead, to all those they had left behind. All around them, men died by scores and hundreds. They watched the poor, attenuated bodies, picked up and carried off, like worthless things, to be buried outside, all in a nameless trench, and wondered how long it would be before their own time would come. Where their comrades, many of them, reared and employed in mills, factories, and stores, failed and died, on the hard fare and cruel conditions imposed, they, who had breathed the free air of heaven and toiled in nature's fields and woods, imbibing strength and sturdiness of constitution, suffered and endured, but were spared. They had hoped for the welcome news of exchange, that would bring them back, after a brief recuperation in one of their own hospitals, into the service, for they were both

enlisted for the war, but with surprise, had heard other names called, while they were left to wear away the wretched hours as best they could.

After his conversation with Professor Hemilstross, Ephraim became extremely thoughtful, sitting for hours, with head bent, in deep absorption, apparently noticing nothing about him. Finally, one day, he approached Phil with what was on his mind.

"Phil," he whispered, earnestly, "be you a good actor?"

"No—why?"

Phil looked at him curiously.

"Bekase, if you was, you could git out o' this hole, an' help me git out."

"Are you going to attempt that role, Eph? Remember your many failures in that line, and beware."

Phil's eyes lighted up with a momentary gleam of merriment, and Ephraim burst into a hearty laugh.

"I'll never fegit it, Phil—no, never, to my dyin' day—the night I got up there in the schoolhouse, an' tried to speak that piece. Say," suddenly, and with a new accession of mirth, "do you know, I can say all on it, now, every darned word,—an' I could, that night, 'fore I got up thar on the platform? Seemed jest's if my teeth an' tongue was stuck together somehow."

"Stage fright," said Phil, gravely, "look out for it if you are intending any more dramatic efforts. What are you contemplating now, Eph? Going to speak, 'We're All Here,' put Professor Hemilstross to rout, break through the dead line and run away? Oh, it's irresistibly funny. How far do you think you could run—Eph—in the present state of your stomach?"

"Not fur."

Ephraim looked at him stolidly, but he was glad to see that he had aroused some interest in Phil's mind in passing events, and the sound of the first hearty laugh he had heard since he saw that pale, emaciated face here in the prison pen, comforted him wonderfully. He had lived for Phil, borne up under trials that must have crushed him, for the sake of his old-time friend, and hidden carefully away his own hurts and sorrows, that his cheerful good nature might keep his comrade from falling into the state of gloomy meditation and apathy that proved fatal to so many here.

"I'm goin' to do a little actin' on my own account, jest the same," he continued, confidently, "I've ben usin' my ears an' eyes sence that onery cuss give me my walkin' papers, an' I've noticed, among other things, thet there don't no one git exchanged out o' here, only them that ain't wuth a cuss for fightin' when they git out. You see," anxiously, "they ain't agoin' to 'xchange no good men back into our army to turn round and fight against them agin—an' I guess there ain't any but would fight agin' after they'd ben in here a spell. Wal, what I'm goin' to do's this,—I ain't agoin' to be as well as I have ben. You understand, Phil?"

Phil nodded understandingly.

"I'm goin' to git sicker'n sicker, all the rest o' the time I stay here. The only trouble with you an' me is, we're too danged well. We'll never git out, till we ain't any use to our own side. So we'll jest fail—but Phil—," in a low whisper, "don't you throw away any of their all-fired poor grub. Eat all you can of it—but lay an' groan an' take on—an' be in awful sufferin'. I guess that'll fetch 'em."

Phil saw the force of this reasoning and admired the astuteness of Ephraim.

For days thereafter, they lay side by side, on the ground, scarcely speaking, and growing apparently weaker with every passing hour. And one day, Ephraim happened to glance up to the dead line. He kicked Phil sharply with his bare foot.

"Phil," he muttered, hoarsely, "look there! Where's Hemilstross? He's gone."

Phil opened his eyes. The place of Professor Hemilstross had been filled by another, a stranger. Phil rolled over on to his side and called to a comrade who was standing near.

"Go and find out where the missing guard has gone," he urged him, "if you can."

"I'll try," and he sauntered away, near as he dared to the dead line. Some of the guards were friendly and he soon returned full of news.

"Gone back into the ranks," he said, "they removed him from here, — said he was too friendly with the prisoners or something, and reduced him to the ranks again. So, he's been ordered straight into the field."

"Gosh! won't that hurt him?"

Ephraim rolled over and groaned audibly. "Oh, Lord, let us git out o' this, an' meet him — anywhere anywhere — only so's we can git at him, face to face."

"That isn't a very reverent prayer, Eph," said Phil, reprovingly, "asking the Lord to deliver your enemy into your hand. Look out that it don't work the other way."

"Wal, if it does, I'm ready," and Ephraim groaned more loudly than ever.

And it so happened, shortly after this, when the roll of the exchanged was called, that Ephraim Binks and Phil Marsh both rose and staggered into the ranks of the departing. And so overjoyed were they

to be again under the protection of the glorious stars and stripes, that they cheered and yelled with all the might that was consistent with their enfeebled condition; and then fell to hugging and kissing each other and their comrades, crying and laughing all together, "for all the world," as Ephraim expressed it, "like a passel o' silly girls."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE joy of freedom and the reaction from the revolting surroundings of the prison pen, proved too much for Phil Marsh, and he fell into a raging fever, superinduced partly by the ravages starvation had made on his constitution. Ephraim Binks, who was also weak and constitution. Ephraim Binks, who was also weak and unfitted for service by his long confinement, refused point blank to be separated from Phil, so both were removed to one hospital, where, for weeks, skilful surgeons battled with the grim destroyer for the life of the young soldier.

Ephraim, as dense on some matters as he was astute and far seeing in others, owing probably to lack of system in his early training, did not allow it to enter his head that he should communicate with the home folks. In fact, at first, he was too dazed to do so. His thoughts, his feelings, and his sensibilities were all wrapped tightly in the fate of the delirious young fellow whom he worshiped with a veneration that amounted almost to awe. Phil was his idol, the model on which he had tried to build his own life, and his whole soul was possessed with the one idea of nursing him back to consciousness and health, and returning with him, when this cruel war was over, to the old folks waiting there.

Phil raved of the old place constantly as he tossed on his hospital cot, the meadow brook with rank green ferns growing so close to its edge, the silver leafed pasture weed that dipped its feathery branches in the purling tide and turned them into molten metal; the

herds of his father's cattle he had driven down there to drink, when the sun was low in the western sky; the lushness and coolness of the long meadow grasses, spangled like a prayer rug of the Orient, with flowers of richest coloring; of the blue sky, the sunlight filtered through the gnarled branches of the orchard trees, by the thick meshes of their leaves; fruit that hung, ripe and luscious, over the garden wall; the waving, rustling green of the cornstalks—and of Hope—while Ephraim listened in wonder.

Little by little he gathered the whole of the pathetic heart story of the youthful hero, and began to understand whose voice had urged his arm to the noble defense of his country's silken banner. He had lived for her, he said in the darkest hours of his delirium, when he had ceased babbling of the running brooks and the trees; and he would fling his arms out, wildly, calling on her to witness that he was not a coward, that he had fought and suffered and died almost, for the flag they both loved, and at her behest.

And then he would plead so gently for her love, asking her if the great service he should render his country had drawn her heart any closer to his own; if in time, there would not come a reward for his patient waiting, if she would ever care for him as she had for his brother. Then he would mutter miserably, "No—no—I am not worthy of it. I am too cowardly. I shall wait for the draft—and she—" his voice would trail away on the breath of a long gasp, "she will be ashamed of me."

Ephraim, gladly accepted as nurse by those in authority, whose hands were full and running over, would straighten the blankets, smooth the pillow, turn it over on to its cool side, with the gentleness of a woman, all the time trying to soothe the paroxysms

of the delirium, with low-toned words of comfort and assurance. In his honest heart, he almost hated Hope.

Once, one of the physicians had asked him, "Who is this he raves of? If it were possible, I should say let her come here and nurse him. That is—" and he looked hesitatingly at Ephraim.

"It ain't," bluntly; "she wouldn't be any use here, an' if he was well he wouldn't want her. It's jest his ravin's. I guess I can take care o' him."

"Very well," and they left him to what they knew would be dog-like devotion and patience.

The illness lasted for weeks, and Phil Marsh woke from it, by virtue of his undaunted will and an inherited strength of constitution, changed in body and mind. Under the faithful care and untiring tenderness of Ephraim, he recovered rapidly, and one day called for pen and ink and paper.

"What you goin' to do now?" inquired Ephraim, bringing them obediently.

"I'll wager anything you like, Eph, that never a line has gone from you to the folks, to let them know I was alive."

"I clean fergot it, Phil, to tell the truth—an' I thought o' course, when you was well enough, you'd go home, git a furlough—an' tell 'em yourself."

"And leave you to go back into the ranks without me? No, Eph, there are reasons why I am not going to think of a return to my home, much as I would like to go, until this war is ended. One of them is, that I made a vow, before I came, that I would not return unless I was disabled so I could not fight, until I had given the last bit of service there was in me, to my country. We are enlisted for this war, Eph. I shall soon be as well as ever I was in my life, and I

mean to fight it out to the bitter end. They do not need me really at home. If I should go at this time, on a furlough, — I would only stay long enough to regain my accustomed strength and then return to fight by your side. No — Eph, you can't fool me. I know what you have done for me, and I will never desert you while the country has need of our services. I am going to arrange it — I feel sure I can — so that we may be ordered out together, and together we will fight and together return, when victory is assured, to the old home. Eph, you're a brick, a hero. I do not know what I said, when I was sick; but whatever it was, you will keep it to yourself, I know. Perhaps you may have learned something that will explain to you why I will not return at this time. There's my hand, Ephrum, as Mother would say."

"God bless her! I'd like to git a good look at her," muttered Ephraim brokenly, as he grasped Phil's hand and wrung it heartily.

The letter, with a detailed account of all their experiences, was sent. But, in the few weeks' stay at the hospital, necessary for Phil's complete recovery, no answer came. They were troublous times, and no good soldier who was anxious to shoulder a gun, went without a chance to fight.

Phil and Ephraim went into camp together, the latter part of the summer, as he had predicted they would. They marched side by side, fought shoulder to shoulder, and dreamed of home and the dear ones there, on one bunk at night. Sometimes Ephraim would urge Phil to write again to the folks at home. But he would reply invariably:

"I've been away so long, Eph, that they must be used to the idea by now, and we are in the thick of battle nearly all the time. If anything should happen

to me now, it would be much easier for them if they did not know I had been found. I do not think they could have received my other letter. Many letters are lost in transportation or destroyed when one of our lines of railroad is seized. The chances are, it never went. And thinking it all over, one night, when it was dark and still, I came to the conclusion that the uncertainty of my fate, under which they have lived for the past year, is better than the suspense and anxiety that would follow my movements now. We have both been changed into a new regiment, so we shall not be readily traced, and if we come out unscathed, I want to give them the biggest surprise of their lives."

Ephraim always acquiesced in any decision of Phil's, so he accepted this also as right because Phil thought it so.

And the march of time was as steady and relentless as the advancing tramp of the opposing armies, the seasons following each other in rotation, till the summer had faded quite away and it was late autumn.

The days of the fading year found Phil's regiment camped on a southern battle-field.

The battle, beginning in the morning, had lasted through the day, each point gained by the advancing army being fiercely contested by the enemy. So the day waned, and the soft purple shadows of twilight melted into the amber light that swept the battle-field from the rising moon.

Following the heavy, reverberating roll of musketry, had come, like a benediction, in the interval of time subsequent to the angelus, a momentary calm, a peace that fell in silvery showers, over the dust and turmoil and terrors of the battle-ploughed valley. In that solemn hush, hostilities

ceased, only the groans of the wounded sounded faint and far on the breath of the evening air. In the transparent blue of the brooding skies, cleared of the murky clouds that had swung over them, like a dark drapery, through the day, hung suspended, like a pendant jewel, a single scintillant star.

A silken scarf, of opalescent splendor, trembled and waved, just over the horizon's rim, blown into folds here and there, or turned over to show its roseate lining, by the vagrant wind of evening. Then suddenly, the moon rose higher, round and gleaming, an amber disk in a sea of sapphire, and a full flood of yellow radiance swept over the mountain side, revealing distinctly the glowing camp fires and the long lines of marching soldiers on its declivity.

Moonlight on the battle-field!

Gently transfiguring, softly glowing, touching here and there the face of the dead, turned in pathetic supplication from the hissing fury of the raging contest to the peaceful calm above, as if there were rest and cessation of warfare, weaving a veil of filmy, lace-like delicacy over the dampened tresses of many a dying soldier, touching with reverent fingers, and turning them to jewels bright, the glistening buttons of their uniforms. Calm effulgence, radiant beams of glory, transforming horror and death and distortion into the peaceful quiet of the luminous night.

Moonlight over the field where warfare is raging!

The great panorama of the battle is spread out before the beholder, ghostly forms marching and countermarching, in the mellowed radiance, the darkly quivering blaze of the occasional camp fire, the sudden flash of a gun and the dense clouds of smoke rolling up and away to join those other clouds

of fleecy whiteness in the illimitable blue. Peace overhead, din and chaos beneath.

One could almost imagine, from glancing upward to the infinite universe, that there should be songs of the full-throated mocking bird in those southern trees, the soft tinkle of a fountain into its marble basin and perhaps, the musical strumming of the vibrant strings of a guitar; not the jangle, dust and confusion of warfare, the sweating, snorting, frightened horses, cursing, shouting men, the uncertain hurrying of feet through the rustling underbrush; a hoarse yell of defiance that echoes and re-echoes under the stars; the spitting of rifles and the deafening, reverberating roar and crash of the thunderous, death-dealing musketry!

That is war.

The countless worlds of the universe never jangle, never are in discord; but roll on their accustomed way harmoniously, in silent contempt of man and his petty dissensions.

All day long, in the choking dust and deafening din of a contiguous battle-field, Phil Marsh and Ephraim had fought, now side by side, now separated, by the divergence of the lines, as some hurtling missile mowed a wide swath of human victims between them, now brought face to face again as the great waves of struggling men surged and beat against the defenses of the enemy. Not a word had they exchanged since early dawn.

There had been evolved, from their untried personalities, and the raw material of which their characters were composed, two hardened, experienced soldiers, who looked upon war as a business, to win as their individual duty, and who, throwing aside the reckless enthusiasm that had characterized their

earlier service, went into battle with grim faces, determined hearts, and a light in their eyes that not even death itself could quench. It is hazardous, playing with such men.

Now, after a brief rest, and such rations as they could assimilate standing against a convenient tree, they had been ordered forward, to the relief of the men who had been bravely holding the side of the mountain before them, during the afternoon. They were inured to the constant sight of the dead and dying all about them, the horribly mangled forms that fell at their side, shedding their life blood at their very feet, were no longer a novelty to them; and with a calmness born of such seasoning as this, they went to battle bravely, not knowing or questioning if theirs would be the next name called by the grim shape that stalked unseen across the field of carnage.

Half-way up the mountain-side they halted, and Phil looked at the scene around and beneath him. The same great disk, mild and lambent, hung suspended in the eastern skies, above the low farmhouse on the hillside, that he had called home. The same stars twinkled and the same fleecy clouds rolled away to the very edge of the horizon. The cattle would all be home by this time; and, having been fed, would be calmly chewing their cuds in the stalls. Perhaps the wide barn door stood open. Perhaps, for it was warmer here, he reflected, the crisp winds would send the brown leaves scurrying across the barn-yard, and he could almost see his father bracing his broad shoulders against the barn door and wheeling it into place. In the south window a little light would shine, and throw tiny beams far into the night. His mother would be stepping carefully about, the early evening meal disposed of, and 'Scilla at the kitchen sink, was washing dishes.

A suddenly shouted order brought him back to the vivid reality of his existence, and he fell at once into the quickstep which was the measure of their advance. There was a little skirmishing in front of him. He could just see Ephraim in the mystic moonlight, a set look on his ruddy face, pushing, pushing ahead, as if eager for and inviting the destruction of the great guns of the enemy. He was surprised at the change in himself, too; only a little over a year ago he had gone into battle hesitatingly, fearfully, dreading the awful death and the gaping wounds of the conflict; but now, — now his nerves were steady, his heart calmly beating, and though death faced him in a thousand guises, he was sure he should not falter.

It was not so terrible to die, after all.

It was the separation from those we love, that was the sting of dissolution, and that he had already accomplished. Now, death would be easy. And Hope, she would accord him at last the full meed of his merit. In her eyes at least he would be a hero, deathless and unforgotten; and, having passed beyond the need of earthly honors, he would have gained in very truth, a conqueror's crown!

All these thoughts kept pace with his feet as he pressed not eagerly, but determinedly forward, step by step, forcing back the serried ranks of those who held the vantage ground they had been ordered to take.

He could see nothing of Ephraim now. Great clouds of black, ill-smelling smoke obscured the moonlight and hid the faces of friend and foe alike. He was in the midst of the fight now, a whirling maelstrom of grimy, bloody men, struggling, groaning, cursing, shouting, and wresting from the very hands of those with whom they were contending, the guns

with which they fought. He struggled, swayed, and pushed now this way, now that, firing when there was a chance, now clubbing his musket and dealing blows to the right and left, on the faces and bodies of those who opposed him, not caring where they fell, only feeling, within his breast, the swelling indignation and hatred that nerved his arm to the frenzy of killing, and delighted in the groans of a dying enemy.

He was blackened with powder, his uniform pierced in a hundred places, singed and torn with molten lead, and yet he lived. And far above his head, lying proudly against the filmy yellow of the overarching skies, floated the gorgeous banner for which he was fighting, and whose folds, shot through and through with hissing shells, was the inspiration of his courage.

They gained ground, only inch by inch. Desperately, sullenly, the enemy receded only when they must, and returned volley for volley of the deadly fire they were under.

It was a weird scene. Like the writhing and contending demons in the infernal regions, while above the peaceful heavens looked calmly down and smiled. All order of purpose or formation in the troops was lost now, each man became a fighting phalanx in himself, his one purpose to kill, maim, or club to death, any who should resist his passage to the ramparts they desired to gain.

Phil fought like a madman, heedless whether there were two or twenty near him, and not caring though he should face the whole army of the opposing forces alone. His mind was in confusion, turmoil. Thoughts rushed there, formless, chaotic things, without reason or logic, and passed away unrecorded. Things that had happened in his child-

hood, little school affairs and strange portents for the future, all crowded for utterance in his seething brain. His eyes were on fire. His throat was parched, his lips swollen and blackened, and his face singed and scorched by the deadly fire he had faced.

He marveled, in an undefined way, that he was still living, but each hot wave of blood that surged through his pulsing veins, whispered to him, "kill — kill — kill!" and he sprang desperately into even hotter conflict than he had been enduring. Men clenched him with the iron grip of death, but he flung them off and clubbed their hands, their faces, until he was free. Then, reversing his gun, took hasty aim and fired, right into their midst, exulting when a sudden cry or groan told him that he had not missed fire.

It was the frenzy of war, and it was upon him with all its force.

Suddenly a hoarse yell, like the cry of a triumphant demon, sounded in his ears, something sharp hissed its way directly toward him, a little stinging hurt came in his side, and involuntarily he clapped his hand to the smarting spot. With great force a hand wrenched his gun from his grasp, an overwhelming faintness seized him, the pale moonlight faded away into the darkness of the smoke-blackened atmosphere, and he felt himself sinking down to the ground.

Just as he perceived that consciousness was leaving him, all the noises of the battle being confused, and a gentle, sighing sound began to ring in his ears, he opened his eyes, raised himself to his elbow with an effort and looked up, to see the face of his destroyer.

A leering visage loomed above him in the strange light, a pair of light, wickedly flashing eyes met his own, and a devilish smile of triumph curved the lips

of the man he beheld. In one hand he held his gun, its sharp bayonet poised to strike directly at the heart beneath. In a moment, in a second, his life blood would follow the gleaming blade, and the triumph of his enemy would be complete. It was a coward's way, too, to strike a man when he was down, and sorely wounded.

He moved his lips and framed one word, feebly. The sharp steel quivered a second, throwing back the reflected rays of moonlight, then moved in swift descent.

"Hemilstross!"

The word just quivered and vibrated on the moving air of the night, and then darkness closed in around him and he sank backward.

And at that moment, a sturdy soldier in the blue of honor and liberty, thrust his arm between the descending blade and the unconscious form that would have received it, and turning it back upon the hand that sent it, stood for one deadly second, facing the sinister eyes of the would-be murderer.

And the moonlight, in that second, revealed to Professor Hemilstross, the honest features of his hated rival, Ephraim Binks.

Then, like a sudden, quivering ribbon of lightning, came a flash, a hiss, and both men fell where they were, fell so near that the crimson stream that stained the ground, where they lay, was of their blood commingled.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WEARISOME struggle with pain and the disintegrating forces of disease had weakened Francis Marsh perceptibly. From being able to walk all over the house and wait on himself, he had by degrees come to a state where it was necessary to wheel him about the room in the great easy-chair which furnished a reclining place through the day. He was horribly thin and attenuated, the fire that glowed in his dark eyes, burning above the yellowish whiteness of his skin, with an almost unearthly brightness.

His voice had grown weaker, his grasp on the hand of the friends who called daily to see him, uncertain and wavering. Yet, above the fires of disease and fever raging in his eyes, the steady light of an undaunted courage, an indomitable will glowed. It was a brave fight and he had a soldier's heroism, but the odds were great, the enemy insidious, and more powerful than any he might have met had he been permitted to camp on the battle-fields of his country.

As the short days of winter lengthened a little and into the air crept a suggestive mildness, while the sunlight yellowed what had been gray and wintry skies, he would ask that his chair might be drawn near the southern window, where he could watch the varying clouds, floating, gliding, over the silky blueness of the dome-like skies, or see gray shadows creep up all along the edge of the horizon, roll themselves

into threatening pillars and spreading over, encompass the heavens with their gloomy tinted mantle.

Silently Sarah Marsh moved about her accustomed tasks, omitting none, shadowed by 'Scilla, who had grown strangely sad and drooping eyed of late, but always ready and eager to anticipate the slightest want of the sitter at the window. Abel Marsh would march stolidly up to the door and into the house at intervals through the day, tread softly as he was able into the sitting-room and ask gruffly, "Wal — how be ye, Francis? Feelin' any better?"

The invariable reply was, "Comfortable, thank you, Father. No worse than yesterday, I think."

"Anythin' you want?" would be the next anxious question. "Can't you think o' somethin' I can git for ye?" and his son would reply with a little laugh, "I have thought of everything I could. But if I require anything more, I will let you know, Father."

The grizzled head would disappear from the framing doorway, and blowing his nose loudly, the bluff and hearty farmer would tramp away to his work in the barn or farmyard again.

Sometimes, when long shadows began to creep mistily out from where they had hidden under trees and behind the broad farm buildings, and noiselessly slip into the house, writhing and distorting themselves across the length of the homely rag carpet of the sitting-room floor, he would call to his mother to sit beside him.

With the invariable ball of blue yarn and her knitting needles, she would draw the rush-bottomed rocker up to his side and work away in the gathering darkness while he talked.

"I have watched the clouds," he said one day, "and especially those of sunset, and thought of all the poets have sung, of the gateway of the west, the dying day and the glory of its close, and how they compare the gorgeous pageant that attends departing daylight with the passage of the soul to higher realms than this; but Mother—," and there was a wistful ring to the feeble tones, "I am afraid I should not appreciate so grand a closing scene as the poets paint. It is all so far away and so unreal. I am not used, you know, to scenes of pomp and splendor. I know I should like, when I am called to go, just the simple, heartfelt farewells we have always taken of each other when we went away on our little journeys from home, and on the other side, one hearty hand clasp from some friend who had preceded me, — just a 'welcome home,' and the promise that soon I should see you all where I am going."

His voice died away in the soft silence of the twilight hour that filled all the room with its holy spell, and Sarah Marsh wiped her glasses on the up-turned corner of her gingham apron.

"I hope, Francis," she said, gravely, "that you ain't troublin' yourself with them things. It seems to me, that your main thought ought to be how to git well. An' I am sure, that God 'll take care o' where we air goin' to when we die."

"It is only natural though," he persisted gently, "that I should have these thoughts. I do not think, Mother, that you deceive yourself about my condition. You know, what I — what my physician — what all my neighbors and friends are aware of. There will not be much longer for me, of the old home life. I am starting out into a new country — going before you and Father, and maybe Phil — to make a home

for you, as you made this for me, before ever I came to live with you. I think it is so much better to look these things squarely in the face. I went out, only a few months ago, Mother, from this home to face war and probable death. You did not falter then, when you knew I might never return. You gave both your sons to your country and theirs, bravely bade us Godspeed to the field of battle. Now that I am going without any of the attendant circumstances of war, just patiently, courageously, I trust, waiting for my marching orders, must we be dumb, because we are afraid to face the truth?"

His eyes were following the floating clouds, the ruddy lances of light that fell athwart the rugged landscape, but now they turned and sought her face.

"I ain't afraid, Francis," she said in a low tone, "an' I will help you all I can. I dreaded when I see you startin' out for the war, an',"—there was a little break in her voice, "I never expected, for one instant, how 'twould come out like this. But I ain't afraid, an' if it is any comfort to you to talk with me about them things, why, as I said, I'll help you all I can."

A little smile, just the faintest gleam of sunshine, wavering and evanescent, hovered for a moment about his lips.

"That's right," he said, "there is a good deal that I want to talk to you about, and somehow, to-night, it just seemed to me that I wanted to think especially about what the future held for me. It is like going away on a journey, only it is a new and untried country for me, and there will be no letters or messages from me—only you will know I am there, and that some time, when your own turn comes, you will come to me, because," softly, "I cannot return to you. You must think of it like that, Mother, and

you must, to please me, try to give Margaret this impression too. It will be hardest for her, she has been so gently reared and seen so little trouble in her short life. She is unreasonable too, about these things, vexed with me if I try to convince her that there can be no future for her and me — on earth. I wish she were like Hope," with a little sigh, "she would understand."

"I wish so too," and his mother thoughtfully picked up two stitches she had inadvertently dropped. "Wal, I'll do my best, Francis. I cayn't make much o' her, — not so much as I can of Hope," apologetically, "somehow, she'n me don't seem to hitch. There's too much o' somethin' in her, an' not enough of somethin' else in me, I guess. But I'll do my best, Francis, I'll try."

"That is like you," gratefully, "and I want you to make her feel, I want you all to feel — Hope and Laura and John — and you and Father — and Phil, when he comes home — that I am right here with you all, though you do not see me — interested in all you do, knowing all your thoughts and wishes, and remembered by you. That is the dearest thought of all to me, as I feel my hold slipping from life — that you will all remember me and talk of me, not as something that has gone forever, vanished from your lives — but as a present influence, always near and always felt."

"I think I understand, Francis —," the slow voice of his mother made reply, "an' I'm sure it'll all be just as you want it to. We shall never fergit you — we sh'd think as much of cuttin' off our right hand — all on us — an' I hope if you can, you'll allus be near us an' stay right here, where you're used to bein'."

She readily understood and acquiesced in the course of reasoning he had pursued and her comprehension seemed to comfort him immensely. Presently, she spoke again, out of the graying shadows that had encompassed them.

"I wish there was some way — I've often wished it sence Phil was missin'—that folks could let us know when they was with us. It'd be an awful comfortin' thing, I think," with a deep sigh.

"We have been brought up to think the veil impenetrable," he said, as if reasoning with himself, "but I do not know, Mother," he turned to her eagerly almost, "if there is a sign I can give, a way in which I can make you feel my presence, I will do so."

"I want you to."

Her voice was calm and unmoved. She too, would face death and its terrors bravely for his sake.

As the days rolled by, bringing the changing seasons with them, they found time for a good many of these heart to heart talks, reaching thereby the perfect understanding impossible but for the resigned acquiescence to the dictum of fate and the quiet reasonableness with which they accepted the inevitable. Of such material as this were made the Spartan mothers of old and the sons they sent forth into battle, unflinching in their bravery, undaunted in death. Fortunate indeed was our country, in her time of need, that such blood flowed in the flower of her youth, the fiery hearts she called to her defence.

One day he dictated to Hope the letter which would bring Margaret to his side. "I do not wish to alarm you needlessly," he said, "but I feel that the time has come now, when we must face together the patent fact of our imperative separation. I

would spare you this, were it possible; but there is no other way. My mother is bearing it bravely, for my sake, and she will help you to stand, when I am not by. You will find her, when you come to know her, as I am sure you will, in the days of trial that loom just in the distance, what I have always found her in the past—a bulwark of strength, a great rock in a barren land, casting the shadow of her courage and calm faith over all about her. Look up to her, lean on her, and above all, learn to love and trust her, for my sake. I cannot spare you this final parting. If I could eliminate its pains I would, but I will try to make it as light as I can for you. So, if you will come, when you get this,—there is no immediate haste, but there are many things I would say to you—I shall be pleased.”

With breaking heart, but tearless eyes, Hope penned the missive. They leaned on her, because she was so strong, never dreaming the depths of suffering her heart could bear and not cry out. His solicitude for Margaret cut her like a knife, though she could hardly understand why. The good fellowship she had allowed to exist between them gave her nothing but the right to be cheerful and brave and calm, a prop to his mentality at this trying time. It was the penalty of her love for him, unrequited, and the misdirected affections of her heart, that there should be for her not even the compensation of a recognized sorrow. She must suffer and endure in silence, standing by, while another shed the tears that burned her eyes and gave way to the grief that was consuming her.

Margaret came, all attention and tenderness, holding him fast with all her slender strength, that availed nothing against the great force that battled

for his life, and crying out against the stern decree of the destroyer, that he should not die — she would not let him go. Day by day, she sat in the quiet sitting room, by his side, holding one wasted hand in hers, and trying, by all the arts she was able to devise, arts that had once had potency enough — but failed miserably of their object now, to turn his mind from the contemplative turn it had taken, and to infuse into his mentality some of her own vivaciousness and sparkle. He brightened visibly, under the influence of her presence, for a little while, but the spell had no permanency. In spite of her detaining hold, he slipped gradually, imperceptibly nearer the confines of the strange country to which he was journeying.

And, one night, in the early spring, when through the chilliness of the atmosphere, crept the faint, low chirp of birds, the scent of flowers rank and pungent, and the flutter of things awakening from their long and dreary sleep of winter, he asked that his chair be moved to its accustomed place by the south window. The vivid hues of sunset were just painting their rarest effects on the canvas of the western sky, visible across the roofs of the great gray barn and the outlying buildings.

“I want to see the sun set just once more,” he whispered, “over the old familiar place, to get my last look at the dear old home when it is glorified by that crimsoning light.”

They moved him to the window and Margaret crept closer to his side, holding with tightening clasp the hand nearest her. Hope stood a little way back, in the shadows that lay over the homely room, watching the flooding glory of the sunlight fall across his face and mirror itself in the clear depths of his eyes. Sarah Marsh, her hands folded over her faded

gown, sat quietly alert; just behind the great arm-chair, while 'Scilla lingered, red eyed and awe stricken, near the doorway. Out in the yard, Abel Marsh leaned on the gate heavily, and looked disconsolately down the yellow road.

"Father's looking for Phil." Francis looked up to say this to his mother. "And some time, while he is watching Phil and Eph'll come down the old pike, past the toll house, and up to the door. I wish I could stop till Phil got here. I tell you, I'd like to see him. You tell him, Hope," the girl came forward out of the shadows and stood before him, "when he does come, that one of my last thoughts was of him, and how I wanted to see him. But," with sudden brightness, "I shall see him."

"Yes, Francis," her voice wavered sweetly away into the growing grayness of the room and he looked up at her understandingly.

"I want it to be just such a night as this, when I go home," he said presently, "with all of you around me, all the home folks—a night you can remember with feelings of gladness, when you come to think of it, in after years, and not with regrets or sadness. I am all right. I wanted to fight for my country, to do something that should live in the annals of her fame; but I am satisfied as it is. I have fought the good fight."

His voice trailed away into the silence of the sunset hour. Outside in the heavens, in oriental splendor, the sun was slowly rolling away behind the western hills, and evening had flung out her opalescent banner to the passing winds. Through the grayness of the gloaming, one long lance of reddest gold flashed its way, cut the dusky shades in two and lay on the floor in one long line, until gradually it faded

away altogether, and was lost among the grisly shapes that infested the darkness.

Then, into the hush that filled the hearts waiting there, the solemn stillness that prevented speech, through the quiet of the old house, broken only by the ticking of the ancient clock on the mantel, with a sudden quivering inspiration, came the sound of one long drawn, peaceful sigh. Then all was still.

And the girl on the little stool, at Francis Marsh's feet, raised her eyes, ever so little, to those watching her there.

"I think," she said, in a dry, tearless voice, awful in its rigid intensity, "that Francis is dead. See, he does not speak—or look at me—and—and—" her voice rose wildly with a horrible fear vibrating in each tone, "his hand has fallen away from mine—and it is so cold—so cold."

CHAPTER XXV.

A PIECE of crape tossed and fluttered on the glass knob of the door. Tightly closed windows, with dark curtains drawn, the Sunday stillness that had fallen over barn and farmyard, gave to the Marsh home a disconsolate look.

Within, Sarah Marsh walked quietly about, arranging this piece of furniture or that, or in low tones directing 'Scilla who was hysterically nervous. Abel Marsh sat in the big easy-chair by the window all day long, gazing abstractedly out through its tiny panes of glass or fumbled mechanically with the heavy chain of silver that dangled on his Sunday vest. Once he looked up to remark as his wife passed and repassed him in her apparently ceaseless round of duties, "I wish Phil was here."

His voice sounded querulous and complaining, and it seemed as she paused and regarded him that he had aged years in the last twenty-four hours.

"So do I," she returned, sadly, "but it ain't any use to wish for what we can't git. Ef I'd hed my way I'd hev both my boys now instid of neither."

It was the only word of complaint she had uttered, the only grudging word she had said against the tremendous sacrifice demanded of her, and in a moment she was creeping softly as was her wont, down the narrow dark passageway to the cellar, after apples for 'Scilla to peel. When she returned her husband was out in the dooryard in earnest conversa-

tion with Solomon Penny and Nathan Drake, who appeared to be pressing some matter earnestly to his consideration. As she passed the door Solomon Penny raised his voice a little and called to her.

"Mis Marsh — Ant Sarah!"

His hoarse tones drifted to her on the breath of a fragrant crisp wind that wafted also memories of the flowers of a previous spring, and, throwing one corner of her apron across her head, she stepped outside.

"Good morning, Mis Marsh."

Nathan Drake removed his ancient beaver from his head with real courtesy and held out a sympathetic hand.

"Mornin' Nathan," she responded, gravely.

Solomon Penny turned to her without further ceremony.

"We've ben tryin' to convince Abel, here, Ant Sarah, that the funeral ought to be in the school-house. He's kinder sot I guess, on havin' of it here, but I 'lowed you'd better be the one to be asked, an' he says, 'All right, let it go as she says.' Now, Mis Marsh, we all want to do what we can to make it jest as easy for you as we can," he glanced interrogatively at Nathan Drake, who, thus appealed to, took up the discourse where he had left it off.

"Naturally, — yes," he said, rubbing his hands together speculatively, "it is our desire, the desire, I might say, of the whole population of Woodley Centre, for that matter, to honor our young townsman as seems fitting to us. But, not for worlds —," he peered earnestly at her from over the rim of his spectacles, "not for anything, Mrs. Marsh, would we do one thing that could add one mite to your sorrow or your sense of loss. So it is, as my friend

Penny has suggested, for you, and you alone, to accept or reject the offer we have made, and we ask, we insist, that you shall consult your own feelings alone in doing so."

On ordinary occasions Nathan Drake would have conversed with his life-long friends and neighbors in less stilted terms, but always, he rose heroically to the emergency, and brought forth the best his vocabulary offered, as appropriate to the service he was called to render. But they knew the kindly heart beneath the pretence of formality and honored him accordingly.

"Wal, I dunno—," Mrs. Marsh turned her head against the sudden gust of wind that threatened her smoothly banded hair, and had already wound her narrow skirt closely about her knees, and gazed reflectively at the tender blueness of the spring-like skies. "I guess maybe," slowly, "it won't matter to us—if the rest of you want it in the schoolhouse. It'll give more a chance to come—an' I suppose—," tremulously, "'s long 's he's a soldier, we oughter give way an' let it be as the neighbors think best."

She looked at her husband, who nodded his head gravely.

"All right, Sary," he acquiesced, "ef it'll be any comfort to the rest of you. I know he'd like it—an' we can hev prayers at the house all the same."

Sarah Marsh left them discussing the arrangements, and returned quietly to her work.

In the afternoon Hope came in, gowned in subdued colors, in such direct contrast to her usual cheerful attire, that the first shock of absolute realization came to the mother's heart of the awful sorrow she had been called to bear. To the girl she set forth the plans that had been suggested. Hope listened silently and nodded her approval.

"Yes—," she said, "I think that would be best. I know he would like to have it so, and all the towns and cities of the nation take pride in honoring their soldier dead. We must let them do as they wish;" and then, leaving the subject abruptly, she inquired, "Where's Margaret?"

"Up-stairs."

Sarah Marsh dropped her eyes to the floor. "Her sister come this mornin' an' is up there with her. We can't do nothin' with her at all. She lays on the bed an' moans an' moans all the time."

There was a certain contemptuousness in this recital that struck Hope's sensibilities.

"Oh, well," she said soothingly, "she has her way, — we have ours. If she is not brave we must not blame her too much. It is hard," and her own lips trembled perceptibly.

"I guess I know it. You're right, Hope, an' I oughtn't to complain of her nor call her no hard names, I 'spose, but somehow, I can't git round her no way I try. An'," stolidly, "I do try."

"I know you do."

Hope's hand crept out and was laid softly on the hardened one of the other woman, "Only she don't understand. Let her alone. She will feel better and then she will appreciate all you have done for her. I came down this afternoon," hesitatingly, "to see if you wanted me to help you about your clothes, — to see if you were going to wear black."

Sarah Marsh raised her eyes ever so little.

"I thought I should," she said, "you know I wore mournin' for my baby that died. Let's see," and she paused reminiscently, "it must of ben nigh on to twenty years ago — a year or two after Francis was born — an' this mornin', I jest went up into the

attic an' brought down the bunnit I had then. It seems to be pretty good. I'll go an' git it an' let you see what you think. Of course, I took it all to pieces an' ironed the ribbon out. I shall hev it made over anyway, but I don't think there'll be any need of buyin' new."

Here was where this woman showed one of the peculiar characteristics of her nature, which Hope accepted as inevitable with the gracious resignation which was a part of her mental equipment; and so, she waited patiently while the elder woman passed noiselessly through the sitting-room, through the darkened "best bedroom" where her idolized son lay, cold and white, in his last mortal sleep, and removed from closet and bureau, a worn black dress and shawl, and gathering up the little bundle of rusty black ribbons and laces, returned to the sitting-room and deposited them in her lap.

"There," she said, "there's all the black clothes I've got 'xcept my silk dress, an' that's too dressy—but I guess them'll do. I ain't agoin' to any expense—it'd be wasteful when them are good enough. An' jest now, when there's so much to do—an' Abel ain't near so forehanded as he was, neither. I had the dress 'bout ten years ago when my own mother died—an' the shawl when Mother Marsh—that's Abel's mother—died—you can remember that?"

Yes, Hope could remember. It had happened when she was a child of scarcely five years, and a pathetic little smile curved her lips as she handled the little accumulation of clothing.

"I sh'll ride down to the city tomorrow," Mrs. Marsh continued, "an' carry the bunnit an' git it made over. You can go if you want to. An' the other things I sh'll brush up an' they'll do."

She took them up carefully and laid them over the back of a chair, and Hope, because that calmly decisive voice left her no alternative, assented to her plans and promised to take the ride to the city the following day.

Just before she was ready to return home, she said, "I wonder if I might see Margaret, if I went up-stairs. Perhaps it would take up her mind, if I could talk to her."

"Certain," and Sarah Marsh rose to accompany her, "come right up. I'll tell her you're here, an' I hain't a mite o' doubt she'll be glad to see you."

Together they went up the narrow front stairway and paused at the entrance to the "spare chamber." Hope knocked softly and a girl of about her own age and size opened the door.

"Come in, please," she said pleasantly, and they entered. There was a cheerful wood fire in the little stove. The room was sunny and bright, great floods of sunlight from the springtime skies lying across the faded carpet and on the chairs and bureau.

"This is Margaret's sister," volunteered Sarah Marsh, kindly, "Mary — an' I'm sure she'll be glad to see you. I've told her about you. This," to the girl, "is Hope that I've told you so much about."

The two girls clasped hands and Hope murmured, "I am very glad to know you. I came up to see if I could assist or comfort your sister. I am so sorry for her."

A fresh burst of weeping directed their attention to the bed, where Margaret Gardiner lay with disheveled hair and crumpled toilet, but little like the carefully gowned woman Hope had been accustomed to see. But her heart sprang up in instant pity for the wretched girl, whose sorrow was no more than

her own but whose strength was infinitely less. She went up to the side of the bed and stood there a moment, sympathetically silent. Then she began to speak.

"Margaret," she said, kindly, "I have come up here to tell you how sorry I am for you, how sorry all your friends and Francis' are, all over the town, and to bring you their loving sympathy, and yet I want to remind you, too, that there are others who sorrow as deeply as you. Cannot you try to rouse yourself and help me in my task of comforting Francis' parents?"

The prostrated girl turned over and raised a tear-stained face to her. "It is very good of you," she uttered, brokenly, "to take so much trouble to bring me comfort, and I thank you. I thank all our friends for their kindness and condolence. But, oh, Miss Hamilton, you cannot know — no one can know — what I have lost," and she fell to weeping again.

Hope turned away with a softly uttered "Good-bye." She saw that her efforts were impotent to stem the tide of the girl's selfish grief, a grief that comprehended nothing save the extent of her own suffering, and she felt that that grief, great as it was, had in no wise weakened the barrier of reserve that had grown between her and the girl Francis Marsh had loved.

The three days prescribed by custom passed drearily away, and the fourth dawned bright and beautiful from somewhere out of the eastern sea, dewy lipped and sweet scented. The skies were one silken scarf of radiant blue, in whose folds gleamed and glowed the sun, a brilliant jewel on the breast of day. It was early spring yet, and there was only a promise in the air of what the future days would bring, but the crisp, bright winds had blown over

dark wooded bowers, stolen the breath of tall, whispering pines and the scent of half-hidden violets, wafting it far and wide across fields where new grasses sprang and over the tender green of the bursting buds on many a tree. All the world was clean, washed by the storms of winter and had come out sparkling and bright.

The darkened parlor of the Marsh home was arranged with rows of stiffly placed chairs all about its walls, and in the center, a space, where reposed the long black box, also prescribed by custom as an accompaniment to the other gruesome accessories of the death angel's visit. But over its grimness and the hueless darkness of its trappings, gentle hands had draped the silken banner of the country for whose sake the young soldier had as truly died as if a burning shot or hurtling shell had found his heart. Dressed in the honored blue he had hoped to wear in battle, he lay calmly sleeping, a pensive smile just frozen on the marble lips, the soft masses of dark hair lying just above the placid brow. And over all, like the encompassing promise of his country's gratitude, the soft folds of the gorgeous stars and stripes lay mutely testifying to the love he had borne for his native land, the love that truly passeth understanding, the love that dares all, does all, and gives all, without expectation of recompense or appreciation. The great flag threw a beam of light, a cheerful tone into the grimness of the room, a sadly needed reminder that there were other things than death and disaster and the eternal parting of loving hearts.

There were a few simple flowers that Hope had brought from her indoor garden, for it was yet too early for the gathered bloom of field and forest; and presently into the midst of the sorrowing friends

came John Sherburne, the loved school-mate and companion of the dead soldier, and standing he repeated a brief prayer.

Then, after a time, the little procession wound its way to the white schoolhouse on the hill, where the villagers held all their revels and their social hours together. Under the desk in front of the little raised platform they laid him, and neighbors and friends filed sorrowfully past to look their last on the features of him who had been one of their boys, whose pleasures and youthful triumphs they had shared and whose untimely passing they now lamented. They listened to some words of comfort from the aged man who had been the pastor of the church Francis had attended in the old university town, and then, after a brief prayer by John Sherburne, friends and neighbors took up their solemn line of march to the old village cemetery on the brow of another hill, overlooking the little town, and at whose feet a winding stream purled and rippled on its way to the great gray seas.

Here, with the solemn rites that befitted the occasion, and with one parting volley, fired by some comrades who had returned from the war, they left his mortal form, peacefully sleeping, his soul gone on that journey of which he had spoken, from which he should never return, but which they too would take, and it would lead them to him.

Long after the house was wrapped in the silence of night, Sarah Marsh sat at the south window, and looking out at the innumerable stars that scintillated in the shadowy skies, reviewed her life and its unhappy climax.

Sorrows she had known, sorrows that had touched her face with cruel fingers, leaving their deep, graven

lines that only the master hand of the angel of death could efface, sorrows that had brought into her eyes dark shadows and almost taught her lips to forget to smile; but this blow had stunned her, torn away the very foundations of her faith and wrought a change in her heart, her life, that should know no reversal. Outwardly calm, she had deceived those who had stood by her in the last few days, into a belief that she was bearing bravely and resignedly the heavy infliction of the hand of fate; but she knew, and she only, that she would never be the same again.

Something had snapped that could never be bound up and there was something wrong at the very springs of her being that would never be righted. Unconsciously the tendrils of her life had twined and intertwined themselves with the luxuriant growth of this younger nature of him who had been and was, her son,—until she had felt this uprootal and transplanting to more congenial soil for him, as a wrench from which the greenness and vigor of her own life could not recover.

The great expanse of the heavens mocked her as she looked forth into the night for comfort. She had been taught to believe in her childhood, that heaven was up there somewhere—"beyond the clouds," and unquestionably had she accepted the pleasant theory for fact. But now, she doubted it—doubted and disbelieved it with the whole strength of her nature, the straight-laced puritanical nature that had been born in her from a long line of ancestors. Something within her rebelled, cried out that it could not be so. Millions of miles must not separate her from the soul of whose growth she had been a part, an indeterminate, unlocated portion of that illimitable expanse, must not, could not swallow up in its

great vortex of struggling personalities, that had preceded him, the individuality that had so impressed itself upon the fibres of her being that a life apart from that sustaining influence was a thing impossible for her to contemplate.

The night winds whispered about the loosened casement and rattled it, but they brought her no word of the lost, no message from the great void that filled the universe of her love, now that he was gone. It was beautiful, calm, and starlit up above. Soft shadows mingled with the iridescent light that was falling far over the landscape and melted into the great peacefulness that invested the farmyard.

She remembered the night before Phil had been reported "missing," when she had seen the great sign of the stars and stripes in the western sky, from this very window where she was sitting now, and she wondered vaguely if God could not throw out for her vision the banner of that far-away country where Francis had gone, and let her behold for one brief instant his tangible evidence of a continued existence and be comforted.

All her preconceived beliefs, all the things she had been taught were the great truths of existence, slipped away from her like a garment, and she stood, naked and alone, beneath the impenetrable heavens, encompassed by the clouds of doubt.

The same stars shone on that new-made grave in the little cemetery on the hill yonder, but there was nothing there that could comfort her, — just the decaying receptacle that had held a beautiful soul. As well hold out to her the shorn and blemished casket when the jewel was gone. Was there then nothing but memory? A retrospective continuation of the days that had been, growing fainter and dimmer as

their point of perspective diminished, and wearing away into the intangible visions of receding time? The great question that agonized her whole being resolved itself into one word — one cry — where?

In all the infinitude of space, magnificent in its dimensions, was there one little spot, as there had been on earth, where he would go on, fulfilling his destiny and rounding out the unfinished life he had laid down here, for the petty warfare of his countrymen? How puerile and insignificant it all seemed to her now, what had been magnified into such glorious proportions by the glowing words of her martyr son.

And Phil — was he too, gone, wandering lonely in the great emptiness of space, missed and passed by by that other soul that knew not where to search for him?

And then, from somewhere out of the darkness that was round her, glided a presence which she could neither see nor hear, yet sensed by some subtle intuition, and stood near her chair. She felt the influence of soft, soothing hands on her head, her eyes, her hair. A sudden peace, holy as it was unexpected, fell over all her senses, and in some inner recess of her soul she felt rather than heard a calm voice say, "Love is the influence, intangible, but stronger than life or any earthly force, or death itself, that draws the soul to its proper sphere. Love finds a place, a home, a work, for those who awaken in the newer life, and love unerring, as the flight of a bird that seeks its nest, will bring to its own the soul that wanders far. There is no infinitude of space so great, no distance so far, but love can and will traverse its length to be with its own."

Then, like a silvery moonbeam, the sense of that gentle presence glided from her side and was lost in the darkness.

But a radiant track had been left in the gloom of her soul and doubt and fear had become as naught, because she believed, in spite of her early training, in defiance of all tradition and reasoning of her material senses, that tonight she had discovered in herself the possession of a faculty she had not dreamed of — a sense that she had not hitherto had; and that, in very truth, though unseen, the presence, the individuality we call a soul, of her beloved son had been with her.

CHAPTER XXVI.

NO story of war can be written, consistent with verity, that does not disclose the gaping wounds festering in many a home all over the length and breadth of the land. To quote from a letter written by General W. T. Sherman, to a friend, in the spring of '64: "In peace there is a beautiful harmony in all the departments of life. They all fit together, like the Chinese puzzle, but in war, all is ajar. Nothing fits and it is the struggle between the stronger and the weaker; and the latter, however it may appeal to the better feelings of our nature, must kick the beam. To make war, we must and will harden our hearts. War, like the thunderbolt, follows its laws, and turns not aside even if the beautiful, the virtuous, the charitable, stand in its path."

Nothing is ever the same, after the whirlwind of warfare has swept the land. True, reconstructions occur, and from a baptism of fire a country emerges, rejuvenated, and with fresh impetus. But there remain, from one of its boundaries to the other, the empty chairs, mute witnesses of the riven chains whose links can never be reunited, the countless graves on quiet hills, the hastily buried dead on far away battle-fields, whose places never are and never can be filled in the homes bereaved.

These results, and many more, follow the visitation of war, and no story can be truthfully written that does not portray the devastation that lurks in its wake.

A year passed monotonously at the Marsh home, recording little more on the annals of its flight than the daily routine of duty and the humdrum happenings of village life. To the Marshes themselves, the changes brought about by the great wave of warfare that had swept the land, seemed momentous enough. Their hearts, their home, were bereft of all that had made life worth the living, all that had stimulated them to the prolonged endeavor necessary to the accumulation of their handsome property.

Now they had no one to work for, no one to save for, the pursuit of competence had lost its zest, and Abel Marsh found himself without the ambition he had formerly possessed. He had struggled with the barren soil, to make it productive of crops, that should help to enrich his children and his children's children. There was enough here now for the declining years of himself and his wife, and he found himself, many times, leaning on the barred gate that led to the meadow pasture land, and contemplatively considering the overarching skies, when he should have been ploughing and furrowing the waiting land.

Sarah Marsh pursued the accustomed tenor of her way, resigned, uncomplaining, to outward view, yet hugging to her breast the utter loneliness, the awful strangeness of separation that filled her life, and clinging, with convulsive frenzy almost, to the little straws of hope whose only foundation might be merely a phantasm conjured up in the recesses of an overstrained mentality. But it does not matter much what comforts us, whether a philosopher would find its arguments tenable, its reasoning well sustained. Many a child has been turned from the contemplation of its grief by a bit of colored glass, or a pebble; and many an older heart, childish in its utter dependence

on some visible source of consolation, has found solace where the laws of scientific research would deny that it could exist.

She questioned nothing: only because this sense of the nearness of the presence, whose physical exponent had been removed from the scope of her vision, brought her surcease of the great pain her in-born conservatism forbade her to share, she accepted its conditions as a starving man reaches out for the food offered him, blindly grateful, and with no investigation of its quality or flavor. Hope brought to her what little gleams of physical sunshine she had. Her unfailing cheerfulness and the brightness of her disposition did much to dissipate the gloom that hovered about the rooms of the old home. Where there were no sons, in the lonely old house, she was the daughter, doing everything in her power to dispel the darkness that had gathered about and aged this father and mother in so short a time.

Margaret Gardiner had lingered a while with them, visiting the narrow mound wherein she had laid her early affections, daily, and burdened by such palpable evidences of her great grief, that she had no condolences, no consolation to offer the parents of her lover; and then, returning to her home and her social duties in the university town, had written to them occasionally and once to Hope, of her bitter loss, a loss which she assured them could never be compensated in this life.

Thus the year drifted away.

Sarah Marsh measured its epochs by the flowers that bloomed and withered where she had planted them, above the grave on the lonely hillside, the gorgeous leaves that fell, weaving over it a flaming chaplet, the sodden rains that dripped above its

grasses, weeping from the skies, such tears as she would have wept on the fresh turf, had the power been hers, and the gentle snows that came fluttering down, like the feathers from an angel's wing, and laid on it a mantle fleecy and stainless. When the snows had melted away, and the genial sun mellowed the springing grasses on the hillside, when the gentle winds began to blow, lulling to rest the wintry storms, lifting the fragrance of half-hidden flowers on its breath and bearing it away across the fields and woods to mingle with the salt spray of the ocean, they had other news of the girl who had promised her hand, her heart, to the dead soldier.

One day, it was a mild one in late March, Hope came into the sitting-room of the Marsh home, whose windows were thrown wide to the pungent breezes and found Sarah Marsh trying to decipher a letter.

She held it out to Hope as she entered. "Here," she said, "you read this, Hope. I can't. It's from Margaret, an' she makes so many twists an' curls on her letters, thet I'm all at sea. I've only jest begun it, an' I guess I hain't got every bit of it right, neither, because I can't make no head nor tail of it anyhow."

Hope took the letter and seated herself by the open window, where the roystering winds had full sway and began at once, with capricious fingers, to tangle the soft waves of her russet hair. She read, slowly and carefully, the opening sentences and then, glancing down the page continued, "I suppose it is only right that I should inform you of my approaching marriage with Professor Morton of the Academy. Possibly you will grieve at this news, and think I have shown lack of faithfulness to the memory of Francis. Let me assure you that he has not been forgotten and never will be, but I have found that it

is a hard world for one who wishes to go away by oneself, and cherish one's grief. In time, such sorrows become chastened, well-loved memories, the reality fades quite away and only the spiritual, the ethereal remain of what was once a solid, substantial affection. It would be a pity if I must go lonely through life, because of my early bereavement. Mine is not a nature that can stand alone for very long. I am not like Miss Hamilton, so strong, so sensible, so brave. I need the prop of a stronger mind than mine, a more positive nature; and, having been offered the affection of a good and true man, I find I have not the moral courage to turn aside from it, and continue my solitary pilgrimage. Believe me, my tenderest affections will cluster about the place where Francis lies buried, and I shall often think of him and mourn for him."

"Sounds nice enough," Sarah Marsh sniffed contemptuously, "but I've allus noticed thet the more fuss anybody makes over anything, the quicker they git over it. I hain't much faith in her sufferin' — I never had, at the time of it — an' all this eddicated talk in her letter won't convince me thet she ain't heartless. Maybe, she can fergit —," she finished abruptly and fell to musing.

"She is young," Hope interrupted gently, "and she has one of those clinging natures that turn naturally as the flower to the sun to any one who will comfort them and take the burdens of life from them. We must not judge her harshly, and, you know —," gravely, "it will not matter — to him."

"You're right, Hope," assented the elder woman, "let her do as she thinks best. But she ain't you — she hain't got your solid common sense. But then, she's got to be what she is — jest what she was made

to be—same's all the rest on us. Ef she can be happy, let her—it ain't none of my affairs to stop her."

So a letter went out that day couched in friendly terms, congratulating her and wishing her all the happiness possible; and presently, were returned, in a small, fancifully embossed envelope, two glazed cards bearing the names of Margaret Gardiner and Professor Morton, enclosed with another which bore in finest script, "Professor and Mrs. Charles M. Morton," and the date of their reception day.

So, that was the close of the touching romance of her life and that of the young soldier, a climax turned aside and altered by the cruel fate that had declared war in a peaceful land.

Following close upon the receipt of this announcement, came a message which completed the severing of all bonds that had held the girl to her allegiance to this family.

The paper, brought in by Hope, one night in early April, just as the sun was falling behind the western horizon, had the news of the surrender of Lee and the practical cessation of all hostilities. At last, the tedious, heart-breaking war was at an end, and hearts that had almost suspended the operation of beating, throbbed quickly and with renewed hope and anticipation. Hope read the good tidings to Abel Marsh, his wife, and 'Scilla, in the gathering shadows of the early twilight, and when she had finished, Abel Marsh removed his glasses, as if he instead of she, had been the reader, wiped them with the great cotton bandanna he always carried, and ejaculated, fervently, "Thank God."

"We hain't got much to be thankful for, ez I can see," retorted his wife dryly, "it's took all we've got."

Hope could see where the cruel conditions of the last few years had hardened this woman's nature and brought out the grimness that under more sunny circumstances would never have developed, and she tried in all ways to counteract this by her influence.

"Oh, well—," she said, cheerfully, "we have much to be thankful for, as Father Marsh says, because our neighbors and friends will not suffer any more, and then, we are not sure in these times of confusion, that there is not some cause for gratefulness for us as well as others. I still hope for the return of Phil and Ephraim."

"We hain't heard a word from Ephrum," said the elder woman thoughtfully, "sence he went out to find Phil, an' I dunno—," with a heavy sigh, "I don't 'spose we ever shall. He wan't much of a hand to write letters—Ephrum wan't—an' if he was killed, we sh'd never know it."

'Scilla, standing in her usual position near the door, had put her apron to her eyes and was crying audibly.

"I am more hopeful," said Hope, "it may be my name, and that I must live up to its significance, but I feel that it is wrong to despair." She rose and went over to 'Scilla's side and taking the coarsened red hand of the serving girl in her own softer one, said kindly, "I wouldn't cry, 'Scilla. The war is over now, for good, and if there is any good news for us we shall know soon. It is wrong to lose hope, until one is sure of disaster. You must try to smile and think as I do, that all will be well. A good many of our soldier boys have gone out and not been heard of for long periods—they are careless about writing or are in prisons—or something; but finally they come out all right. Let us not despair,"

'Scilla looked up at her gratefully through her tears. "How good you be," she said, enthusiastically, "an' if I hadn't used Ephrum so mean, 'fore he went away, I shouldn't feel so now. But he wouldn't take no notice of me at all, even the mornin' he went away, an' if he should come back, I jest guess he wouldn't neither."

"Don't you think so—;" Sarah Marsh nodded her head vigorously, "Ephrum ain't no fool, an' when he see that you was, by the way you was actin' with that singin' marster, why, he jest dropped you, an' I didn't blame him neither. When you're ready to behave an' be sensible, he will be—you mark my words. That is—," with a sudden drop in her voice, "if you ever set eyes on him agin."

These simple-hearted people shared in the joys and sorrows of those who served them, and listened as patiently to their woes as if they had been of one blood.

The news of surrender caused a general sense of profound joy and thanksgiving in Woodley Centre. Solomon Penny rang the old school bell till its hoarse tones raised the echoes, tightened the cord that had held the flag floating over the temple of learning, and at night, with the help of Solon Wiseman, who dimly understood by the glowing faces he saw all about, that all cause for anxiety and alarm had passed, built a huge bonfire on the space in front of the schoolhouse, using every empty barrel and box he possessed or could collect. Enthusiasm spread like wildfire. Old men who had only hobbled, leaped for joy about the blazing fagots and yelled themselves hoarse cheering for the triumphant cause. A rally was held in the schoolhouse, presided over by John Sherburne, who had received his ordination, and was

a full-fledged minister of the Gospel, with a church at the Four Corners, and Nathan Drake, who studied the dictionary assiduously to find new words to express the ebullition of his sentiments.

On Sunday a service of thanksgiving was held in the same place and Sarah Marsh attended, as did all the villagers, clad in the scanty costume of rusty black whose long lines seemed so strangely accentuated by the contrast to the festooned skirts, balmoral boots, wide cloaks, and round hats of the more fashionable inhabitants of the little town. They sang good old "Coronation," the Doxology, some war songs, and finished with "The Sweet By and Bye," a new song of much beauty and which had been received with storms of applause wherever it was sung. All returned home with devout thankfulness in their hearts, a thankfulness that was destined to suffer a relapse in less than a week.

Scarcely had the joyful tidings been accepted in their fullness, when the terrible news of the assassination of President Lincoln broke in upon their rejoicing with such a shock as the country had never known before. In an instant, consternation exceeded exultation, emblems of sorrow took the place of those of rejoicing, a nation was plunged from the most exalted joy to the very depths of grief. Locomotives steaming into the great railway stations of our larger cities, as well as the diminutive structures that did duty in the rural districts, bore floating, fluttering streamers of black, mute testimonials of the overwhelming grief that brooded above the nation's heart like the sweep of the death angel's wing at a marriage festivity. Great business blocks, tall, steepled churches, school-houses and private mansions, in the centres of industry, alike with the humble village store, the ancient

meeting house and the low-browed broad roofed farmhouses, bore the symbols of great mourning.

A solemn hush had fallen over the loved country, in the very midst of her rejoicing, shouts of triumph were turned to cries of grief, flags that had blown wildly free in the spring winds, now drooped wistfully at half mast. A nation mourned; but as one of its most illustrious sons of a later day—himself a martyred hero—has said, "God still lives," and a great joy at the promise of peace chastened the hearts of the weeping multitude.

The clouds were heavy, but behind them the sun was still shining, and he still remembered and loved his people, though gone from their sight, who had said: "We are not enemies, but friends. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic cords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this land, will yet swell the chorus of Union, when again touched, as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature."

In the widespread sense of the great national loss which touched every heart of all the vast population with a feeling of personal affliction, the Marshes commingled their own and so lost some of its bitterness. They mourned with the nation and the nation in turn, bereaved like unto themselves, reached out its all-enveloping arms and sheltered them.

Hope watched the papers eagerly, bringing them all down to the farmhouse each night, and reading faithfully to them all that might be of interest. Faithfully indeed had she kept the charge given to her in return for Phil Marsh's promise to make her proud of his heroism.

The days lengthened imperceptibly. Over all the broad pasture land, by rippling streamlets, in far distant bowers of wildwood beauty, where dark branches laced and interlaced, crossing the sunlight with fairy designs of intricate pattern, flowers bloomed, birds sang, leaves swelled and burst, and tiny shooting green things put up their tender foliage for the genial sun to kiss.

Hope walked under the blue skies and felt the promise in the air. Daily she laid an offering on the grave of him for whom love had passed, by a transforming influence, unsuspected by herself, from the passionate affection of a loving woman to the tender, ministering devotion of a sister.

There were a few dark pines on the hilltop where Francis' grave was made, and in the shade of these she paused one night and watched the beautiful sunset, whose panoramic colors were spread out over the western sky and whose splendors rivaled the rarest works of art. A great expanse of pearly blue hung shimmering just above the tree tops, a turquoise banner whose edges, fringed with richest crimson and gold beyond an opalescent border, were turned over and floated by a passing wind.

The dark trees loomed like dun-coated sentinels, straight and tall against the lovely skies, silhouetted sharply, while the undulating grasses of the hillside, swept into billows by a low wind that sighed and whispered, reached away about her feet and down to the fragrant meadows below the hill. Soon the moist fields would glow and scintillate with star-eyed daisies and sweet scented, pink-tinted swamp flowers; but tonight the smooth sweep of greenness was unbroken save for the placid waters of a purling brook, that lay like a silver ribbon, tossed in fantastic loops on the landscape.

The faint tinkle of a cow bell sounded in her ear, mingled with the music of the underworld, that tiny flutter and murmur of insect life hidden away beneath the tall grasses. From afar off in the city, whose turrets and spires she could discern, like the castles of an oriental dream, she caught the distant pealing of the sunset bell, and involuntarily she stood motionless, in veneration of the passing day. Great clouds of purple fringed with rarest gold rolled up to meet the sun god in his chariot of fire. The gate of night unclosed its fastening of a single jeweled star and the chariot of the day god rolled through noiselessly, leaving behind it a glimmering cloud of splendor. Long shadows crept from somewhere behind her, where the air had suddenly grown gray and chilly, and flung themselves on the narrow mound, writhing and tossing like distressed souls.

The tall pines stirred their branches with a peculiar singing noise and the soft grasses rustled at her feet. How peaceful it was here! What calm, what forgetfulness of the turmoil of life, brooded over this resting place of mortality, this city of the dead! Long lines of ruddy gold lay on the verdant hillside, the last beams of the fading day, as she turned away and went out through the little turnstile that marked the entrance to the cemetery.

Up there, in the silence and alone, she had fought out many a mental battle in the last year, and there, tonight, had she been face to face with herself, the hardest experience of the soul in its mortal life; and without disloyalty to the dead, she had discovered that her sisterly love and veneration alone remained of the great passion she had thought unchangeable.

Slowly she retraced her steps, past the low wall with its overhanging trees, along the straggling fences

that bound the pasture land by the side of the road, and down to the door whose threshold she had trodden so often and whose altars were, in very truth, her household ones as much as those where she dwelt with her father and mother.

At the door she paused. The house was all silent within. She laid her hand on the latch and lifted it. In the gloaming that invested the kitchen with strange, soft lights, 'Scilla was working silently over the supper dishes. She passed through with a gentle "Good evening," and into the sitting-room. There was no light, but enough of departing day still lingered to show her the features of Sarah Marsh by her accustomed window, with listless, idle hands and a strangely worn and aged grayness on her countenance. From the exaltation of her twilight hour on the hillside to the sober, colorless existence of the woman at the window, was something of a descent, and her heart responded in instant pity to the suggestiveness of the woman's attitude.

"Good evening," she said, pleasantly, "where is Uncle Abel?" but the simple words carried an undertone of sympathy unexpressed whose subtleties reacted on the nature of the one to whom they were addressed.

"That you, Hope?"

She peered through the dimness to see her face. "Abel's gone up to the toll house to see John Dale 'bout somethin' or nother. Come right in an' set down."

She moved a trifle in her seat and indicated with one hand the low rocker Hope had often occupied. But Hope, hearing the sound of wheels crunching the gravel in front of the house, had gone to the window and was looking out.

"Aunt Sarah!"

She turned to the elder woman excitedly. "Come here. Come here. There's a carriage stopping here—at the very gate. And yes—I do believe—I know—," she was laughing now hysterically, but great tears gathered in her eyes as she talked, "oh, Aunt Sarah—," she turned as the elder woman reached her side and threw her arms about her neck, "it is—Phil—and—and—Ephraim."

With blurred eyes Sarah Marsh glanced out of the window. A carriage from the city had halted at her gate. In the gloaming she could just discern an attenuated figure standing beside the open door of the vehicle, while the driver endeavored to assist him with some one inside.

"Hope," she muttered, unbelievably, dazedly, "did you say it was Phil—my Phil? Say it agin! That ain't Phil—oh, it can't be," and her voice broke in an agonizing sob. "It is! It is!"

Hope drew her along with her to the door and half-way down the steps murmuring as she went, "Oh, he is changed. See how thin and pale. But it is Phil—it is."

Her voice rose triumphantly on the evening air and was wafted down to the trio at the gate. A young man in a shabby blue uniform turned a pale, sharp featured face in which burned two great hollow eyes, like live coals of fire, as he caught their words.

"Mother! Hope—," and he left his burden in the stout arms of the hackman to reach out his arms to them.

"Oh, Phil—Phil!"

The grizzled head dropped on his shoulder, two long arms swept him to her bosom and his mother, the cold staid woman he had ever known, wept as

she murmured words of welcome, incoherent, fondlings in his ear. Hope was standing there in the shadows, great tears of bliss and sympathy falling from her eyes. Then, suddenly, Phil looked up to her.

"Poor Eph," he said, contritely, "I almost forgot him. Too weak to walk," he whispered suddenly. "Call 'Scilla, will you?"

But 'Scilla had heard the commotion and was standing in the doorway.

"What is it?" she asked, eagerly, and then, "Oh, Phil!" she screamed, and rushing down the path, covered his hand with kisses and tears commingled. Phil turned back to the hack and turning his shoulder to its interior, helped the hackman to take therefrom the skeleton of a man, a long, thin, fleshless anatomy, trembling in every limb, convulsed with a racking cough, bloodless, ghost-like, but smiling broadly.

"That's Eph—," said Phil, shortly, "what there is left of him. That's what they did for him in the prison pen. I was nearly as bad, but not quite. "Eph—," gently as if he were talking to a sick child, "here's Aunt Sarah, and Hope—and 'Scilla."

The sick man raised his head and Sarah Marsh went to his side, putting one strong arm under his shoulder. He turned to her, a cadaverous smile lighting his features.

"Lo, Mis Marsh—," he said, feebly, "I brought Phil back, you see. I allus said I would. But oh, my"—and he groaned deeply, "ain't I hungry though?"

'Scilla had started to walk down the path to meet him. When she caught sight of the skeleton-like figure, the fleshless, chalk-like face, and the great,

burning, hungry eyes, she uttered one wild shriek of dismay and fled, weeping loudly, up the steps again and through the house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'SCILLA HICKINS."

"Yes, Ephrum," obediently.

"I want somethin' to eat. Hurry up now an' fetch it."

"I can't, Ephrum. Mis Marsh said you wasn't to git another thing for two hours,—them's the doctor's orders, an' he's got to be minded."

'Scilla was sitting near the window, a spool of thread and two knitting needles in her lap. Ephraim lay on the big lounge near the stove, in which, though it was already the first of May, and the day after his arrival, there was a fire. He looked up at her commandingly.

"You've got to git me somethin' to eat," he said, tersely, albeit his voice was weak unto almost a whisper.

"I'm awful sorry."

'Scilla moved away from the window and came to his side. "I would if I dast, Ephrum. I'll do anythin' else for you, but I can't do that."

"Will you?"

He caught at the hand hanging limply at her side.

"Guess you don't know what you're talkin' about, 'Scilla, do you?"

'Scilla grew very red in the face and snatching her hand away from him, said quickly, "Tell me all about yourself now, Ephrum. How you come to be so sick an' all the rest. I'll set right up here at the head of the lounge, an' then you needn't talk so very loud. 'Twon't tire you, will it?" anxiously.

"'Twouldn't if I hed somethin' to eat. P'raps if I talk I'll fergit how consarned hungry I be. That's the way Phil an' me used to do when we was in the prison pen. Yes, you set right there," approvingly, "where I can see your face, — cause there's somethin' I hev ben wantin' to tell you, sence I come home. P'raps you'll think I ain't much of a feller to tell it at all, but I ain't agoin' to keep nothin' back — now — or forever."

He raised his head slightly and looked away out through the window, at the southern skies, thoughtfully.

"South—," he murmured after a while. "That's the south we see out o' that winder, 'Scilla — if you hed looked out there any day while I was gone, you'd seen the direction anyway, where I was fightin'—an'," reminiscently, "we done some pretty tall fightin' too."

"I 'spose you did."

'Scilla was knitting some coarse white cotton lace and her head was bent, counting the stitches.

"I see a friend o' yours when I was in prison," Ephraim remarked presently, in an off-hand manner, but his eyes were fastened on the ruddy face of the girl beside him. She started and all the color receded from her cheeks and brow, then returned in a sudden flood.

"Yes," slowly, "Professor Hemilstross. He was one of the rebel guards." Ephraim placed an emphasis on the adjective that was almost cruel, and the girl winced perceptibly.

"Rebel," she faltered, for want of a better word to say.

"That's what I said — an' he done his best to make it pleasant for us too. He was the means o'

bringing Phil into the pen, found him on the battle-field, an' for the sake o' a pair o' boots Phil was wearin' an' cause he knew Phil was a friend o' mine, too, I guess, he kerried him off of the field an' into the enemy's lines where he was held as a prisoner."

'Scilla did not stir. Her head was still bent over the lace work and she seemed to be counting assiduously.

"He had to turn traitor you know—," Ephraim went on after a little, "to git the high position he was holding'—in the pen—an' if it hadn't ben for Phil, a good many times, after I come, I should hev sassed him or done somethin' careless, an' he would of got a chance to take a shot at me."

He looked at the girl keenly. She shivered a little. She was bearing her punishment bravely, but though his heart was touched by the spirit of patient submission that had fallen over her, he would not abate one item of the severe lesson whose effects he knew would be salutary.

"Finally," Ephraim went on as if talking to himself, but his eyes followed her every motion, "he got transferred back to the fightin' line on account o' undue familiarity with us, one o' the guards said. He hailed us once an' tried to kill us, more'n a dozen times. Then we didn't see no more of him, 'cause Phil was took sick an' I took care o' him till he was well, an' then we went back into the ranks. We got into the same comp'ny and fought side by side pretty near all the time. Finally come the night when we was ordered to carry the mountain. We usually done most o' our fightin' by daylight. When it come night we was tired enough to quit, an' both sides would be more'n willin' to call off their men. But this day we had held the valley after fightin' fur it all day

long, an' when it come evenin' hed drove 'em like so many cattle up the side o' the mountain."

A little flush dawned in the yellow cheek turned toward 'Scilla, his eyes sparkled with something of the same fire that had glowed there when the actual fighting took place. He was living the scene over again and his voice thrilled the girl with its deadly earnestness.

"There was a bright moon shinin' an' we marched straight up the side of the mountin'. Our camp fires burned every little ways, an' some that was down in the valley, watchin' us, said it was an awful pretty sight. We didn't think o' that—Phil an' I. Phil was captain o' the comp'ny I was in. He got promoted for what he done 'bout keepin' the flag in place, fust battle he was in; but he managed to keep close to me all the time. That is," apologetically, "to keep me near him. I was kind o' body servant to him. But we got separated after the battle begun. 'Twas all thick underbush where we was, an' most o' the fightin' was done man to man, hand to hand."

'Scilla had dropped the lace work in her lap now, and was enthralled with the recital.

"I was fightin' tooth an' nail. If I be awkward an' lumpin' I can hold my own in a fight—pushin' ahead fast as I could, an' fergittin' all I knew but jest that Phil an' them higher'n him expected me to do my darndest, an' all I cared was to shoot an' hit an' scratch an' claw my way ahead, if I couldn't git there any other way. All at once, over in a little clearin', I seen Phil. He hed a clubbed musket an' was givin' it to 'em right an' left. Then, before I could holler, an' by gracious, if I had hollered, he wouldn't heard me—you never heard no sech noise—I seen a man creepin' up towards where Phil was

standin' right out plain in the moonlight, an' it was most as light as day. This feller skulked in the shadder, so's not to be seen himself. An' I see him takin' aim at Phil. When he was sure—sertain sure o' his aim—he raised his gun an' I let a Comanche yell out o' me. I could yell some then ef I can't now—an' I jumped in or tried to, between 'em. I was too late."

Ephraim paused, breathing heavily. 'Scilla looked up from the hands she had folded listlessly in her lap.

"Ain't you too tired, Ephrum," she asked, "to tell the rest?"

"No. I want you to hear it all."

He braced himself for the effort and continued.

"Phil fell right whar he was standin'. An' as he went down, he seemed to know the villain that hed crept up to him cowardly like an' fired. "Hemilstross," he said an' then he didn't speak no more. I threw out one o' my arms to keep the varmint from puttin' his bayonet through Phil, an' jest then, some one behind us fired an' we both dropped. We was overlooked agin', Phil an' me—when they gathered up the wounded—we was in a kind of a out of the way place—an' when our troops left the field an' the rebs came back to see what they could find, some on 'em, we call 'em in the army—an' there's plenty on 'em on both sides—ghouls—because they steal from dead bodies—they found us layin' there an' took us an' carried us off. An' that was how we got into a prison pen the second time."

Ephraim paused and regarded 'Scilla steadily. For a few moments neither the girl nor he spoke, and the silence remained unbroken, save for the ticking of the old clock on the mantel. Finally Ephraim looked down at her gravely.

"Ain't you agoin' to ask me what become of your friend, the professor?" he asked her.

"I dunno."

The girl's cheeks flamed crimson and she began to fumble nervously with the lace.

"You'd better," grimly, "'cause you ought to know. When they picked him up he was dead."

Ephraim turned over on the lounge, closed his eyes with a weary sigh and remained motionless and silent. He could hear the sound of 'Scilla's chair as she rocked back and forth vigorously, but he would not look at her, though he would have given worlds for one glimpse. They remained thus for the space of five minutes. The girl coughed gently.

"You asleep, Ephrum?" she asked him timidly.

"No," in a low tone.

She moved her chair around so that it faced the lounge and its occupant. Presently her voice—and there was the suspicion of tears in it—reached his ear.

"I don't care, Ephrum, if he is dead. I don't care nothin' for him now, an'," hesitatingly, "I hain't sence long before you went to war, the last time. I wisht he'd died before."

A little light broke faintly over Ephraim's features, but his eyes remained closed.

"I thought you did," he said, feebly, "you know you give all on us that impression."

"I know it," the girl's head drooped penitently, "but I didn't mean it. Honest truth, I didn't, Ephrum."

"What did you mean, then?"

Ephraim unclosed his eyelids slowly. He had looked strangely like a dead man with them closed, and 'Scilla was relieved.

"I didn't mean nothin'," she replied, excusingly, "only—I thought he was nice—"

"An' you thought I was a fool," Ephraim nodded sagely, "an' he thought I was, too, because I was big an' lumberin' and awkward. Ef it hadn't ben for Phil, I guess I never would had no sense, nohow."

"I liked you better all along." The full tide of the girl's repentance flowed from her lips now, and its waves soothed the spirit of the young man into a great calm. "But I was green too, Ephrum, I guess or somethin', an' I thought it was mighty fine to hev him come an' git me an' take me to singin' school an' meetin' with him. Mis Marsh used to tell me he didn't want nothin' of me, an' that when he'd got sick o' me he'd cut an' run. Them was her words exactly, an' one night he did—an' he didn't leave me nothin' but a letter sayin' he might never come back, 'cause he was goin' to Canedy to git rid of the draft. An'—an'—" Peonies in all their glory could not rival the splendid coloring of the girl's cheeks now, "When I see you, Ephrum, marchin' off to the war, willin' an' anxious to git thar an' do some good, an' when you jest up an' went the second time to find Phil, so's Mis Marsh could hev him agin, I seen the difference between you an' the professor. 'Twas his clothes bewitched me, Ephrum. Mis Marsh she allus said so, an' I guess it was so. I—I hope—," hesitatingly, "you won't lay it up against me, Ephrum, an' that we can be friends."

"No, we can't." Ephraim's yellow countenance, through whose skin the great bones protruded ominously, was lighted now by a sudden radiance, and he reached out one long cadaverous claw and touched the hand of the girl nearest him. "No, 'Scilla

Hickins, we can't never be friends agin, 'cause why," and he laughed a little tremulously, "'cause we're goin' to be somethin' better."

One lean arm enfolded the round waist that was temptingly near him, and without asking she laid her ripe, cherry lips against the bloodless, blue, and pinched ones of her homely hero, and their two souls met in a caress in which Professor Hemilstross sank into the everlasting oblivion his memory deserved.

Presently they heard Sarah Marsh lift the latch of the kitchen door and then her slow tread sounded in the passageway. Ephraim looked up at 'Scilla happily.

"You git up an' see what time it is by the clock, 'Scilla. That's Mis Marsh come into the kitchen. An' ask her, from me, will you, if it ain't most supper time—an' if it ain't if I can't hev jest a bite o' luncheon."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IT was always a matter of much regret with Philip Marsh that he had written home but once during his three years' service. But there is much to be deplored in all lives, and the faithful record thereof must of necessity be pathetically filled with mistakes.

Almost his first question when he entered the familiar room where so much of their home life had been passed had been, "Where's Francis? Hasn't he returned yet? I was sure I should find him here waiting for me."

Hope stole softly out of the room and left him alone with his mother.

"Hain't you seen no one, Phil?" she asked him, calmly, "sence you come home? Didn't no one tell you?" She pushed her spectacles far up on her forehead, and regarded him compassionately.

"No," hurriedly, "why, we just took a hack and came right up from the city. Eph was so ill and we were fresh from Washington where we were mustered out. What is it — Mother — tell me, what has happened to my brother?"

His voice was sharp with emotion and he leaned weakly against the table for support.

Sarah Marsh came closer to him and laid one wrinkled hand on his shoulder.

"Pore boy," she said, slowly, "pore Phil. Tain't much of a comin' home, is it? Phil—," her tones were even and unimpassioned, but he caught a note of the grief that thrilled them, "Francis come home be-

fore you did, over a year ago — yes, nigh onto a year and a half — an' — he was sick when he come, an' he didn't seem to git no better. 'Twas consump-tion the doctor said, an' he got it layin' out on the ground with nothin' between him an' the dampness 'xcept a blanket, waitin' an' waitin', Phil, every day an' all the time, for marchin' orders that never come. He got 'em though, finally, an' — he's gone. Died a year ago the twenty-second of last March, Phil."

The distance of the whole wide world seemed to lie between Phil Marsh and the voice that was speak-ing. Then he shook himself and remembered that it was he who had been spoken to, and tried to reply. But great sobs choked his utterance. He was very weak from long deprivation and hardship, and the tears came readily under the influence of the sudden reaction.

"Set down, Phil." His mother forced him gently into a chair, and then stood over him, quietly smooth-ing the dark locks that lay damply on his forehead, while the force of his grief spent itself. "I'm awful glad," she said, finally, when quiet had begun to fall over the shadowed room, "that we've got you left, Phil. One spell, Father'n me both thought we hadn't got nobody left to us. An' Father'll be awful pleased 'bout your comin' home, Phil. Tain't right for you to take on so 'bout Francis. He left lots with me to tell you, an' I hain't forgot a single word of it neither. He's better off, Phil, where he is, an' when he went out to the war, you know, he would go — an' we all hed jest about give him up then."

Phil raised his eyes for a moment.

"Margaret," he said, shortly, "how is she bear-ing it?"

"She ain't bearin' it." Sarah Marsh laughed a trifle bitterly. "She's gone an' got married this spring. She hain't no more feelin's than a goose, if I do say it."

"And Hope? It was an awful blow to her."

"She's ben an angel o' mercy in this house, Phil, sence it happened. What Father'n me'd done without her I don't know. She's brave, an' she's allus said you'd come home all right. There's Father now. I must run an' tell him, so's he won't come in here sudden."

She laid her hand, just a moment, lightly, on the dark bowed head and then glided noiselessly from the room. And presently Phil heard the sound of heavy boots in the passageway outside, and the noise of his father's nose, vigorously blown. Then the door burst open and Abel Marsh crossed the room in three steps. Phil tried to rise, but his emotions had been too much and he sank back weakly.

"Don't git up, Phil. Set still, old feller," and with a hearty grip, Farmer Marsh grasped his son's hand, wringing it boisterously. "Wal, I am clean beat out, Phil. This is the happiest day o' my life."

Tears streamed from the light gray eyes, shaded by grizzly, shaggy brows, and the bluff, hearty voice of the old man trembled.

"Bless my heart," he ejaculated, presently, "you're as yaller as a saffron bag, and peaked as a half-starved shoat. Mother," turning away to hide his emotion, "can't you git him somethin' to eat, an' then, I swan, I'll bet he'll gain ten pounds while he's eatin' it. I was jest talkin' to John Dale about all the soldiers that hed come home, an' I said I wish my Phil would somehow manage to git us word, an' I'll be blessed if he wan't here all the time, waitin'

for me. Where's Eph? Did you tote him along too?"

The sound of that bluff voice did much to revive Phil's flagging energies and he replied, quite cheerfully, "Eph's in bad shape, Father. I guess Mother has sent him off to bed. I don't see him anywhere."

Abel Marsh was overjoyed at the return of his son, so much so that the very next day he rode over to the home of Nathan Drake who was justice of the peace and, having no other son, immediately caused his will to be drawn, giving everything he possessed to Phil.

"If I die first, Sary," he told his wife, "you'll be all right. Phil'll see to you."

And Sarah Marsh had answered, "I know it. I'm satisfied to leave it so."

Phil seemed to want to do little for a while, subsequent to his discharge, but lie around, rest, and eat. It was during those days of enforced idleness, while he was "getting used," as he termed it, to the new state of affairs, that his mother related to him every detail of the sickness and death of Francis, and the recital seemed to bring their two hearts nearer together, to draw Phil into something of the place his brother had filled; and gradually they came to know each other better. He learned to admire her strong courage, her quiet heroism, and she to appreciate the thousand little services he performed for her unostentatiously.

Hope came as usual to the old house under the hill, and the untroubled stream of their good comradeship flowed uninterruptedly through the quiet course of their lives. She was proud of him, proud of the unflinching bravery that had led him to the very jaws of death and which had brought him pro-

motion and some popularity. Since his return, now that the turbulent whirlpool that had stirred the heart of the nation had subsided, and peoples, parties, and factions were recovering their equilibrium, finding out where they were, many complimentary notices of the heroism of the young soldier crept into the daily press, many anxious inquiries were sent after his health, and many slight honors conferred upon him. He bore these blushing, fled from the room when Hope found his name in the paper, and refused all offered positions or social advancements that came to him.

"I did my duty," he would say, "and that alone. I went to war with the one object of proving myself not a coward, and if I have done it, that is satisfaction enough for me."

Hope felt the reproof of his voice, knew that it was she who had endeavored to spur him to the performance of his apparent duty, and felt how bitterly she had wounded him when she had allowed her enthusiasm for the cause to carry her to the point of enjoining him not to "wait for the draft." Her whole soul burned with hero worship. He knew this, and having become inured to sacrifice, decided quietly not to acquire through the instrumentality of admiration for his prowess in battle, his patriotic zeal, his achievements in the field, what he feared the humdrum commonplaces of everyday life could not sustain. There had been no love for him in the heart of the girl who had thrust him into the ranks, heedless of aught save a fear that he should not play the hero and live up to the noble example set by his brother. Because he had preferred the calmer life, because his was not the nature to enthuse with the feverish abandon of Francis, but had seen his duty nearer in

the lives and hearts of these older people, who were his care and needed the strength of his youthful arm, Hope had come very near to despising him.

Obedient to her bidding, he had girded on the armor and gone forth; and now, having come again, he was so ready to renew the peaceful pursuits of agriculture, that he feared the halo would disappear from his brow, the glamor from the modest title he had won, because he had not the brilliant qualities to keep him in the path of glory when there was no longer any real need.

And Hope?

Her soul thrilled with the story of his heroism; in her eyes he was more splendid than all the knights of old, and nobly had he won the prize she had bidden him capture. But of her heart, she was doubtful. She had never questioned the depth or sincerity of her love for Francis Marsh. It was the affection that had grown with her growth, developed with the maturing of her mind and satisfied all the demands of her nature, a nature that exacted from every emotion its fullest possibilities. She had known no other love, longed for none. When his love had been taken from her and given to another, she had suffered it to be so, since he wished it, and since his happiness was her first consideration; but had abated no infinitesimal portion of her own regard for him. When his removal from an earthly plane exalted and refined the sense of her affection, she discovered that, under the new conditions, where there would be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, her feeling had unfolded like the heart of a flower at early dawn, disclosing a purified, sacred, sisterly love for the departed hero.

She mourned him sincerely.

But he was etherial now, essence of the divine and supernatural, and it was rather the incense of a religious devotion she brought to the sacred shrine of his grave than a real, human affection. And she felt that, as Phil's horizon had broadened, as he had been educated and advanced by suffering and trial, the great want that had consumed him when he desired her love, had fallen away from him and left him clothed only in his own great strength and manliness.

So, while the days went by, she waited.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IT was already June. A wealth of scented apple bloom had smothered the old place and, drifting down, floated over the greensward. The skies were blue, bluer than the far-famed Italian canopy, deeper than sapphire and silken soft. Fleecy white wraiths, fit pillows for heads of the angels, crept out of dim cloudland, fluttered an instant on the horizon and were blown away. The winds were very sweet and they swayed and tossed rose-laden branches in wanton disorder. Everywhere the pungent smell of blooming flowers permeated the air. June, the most beautiful month of all the year, the acknowledged queen, because she is the gentlest, held high carnival in her courts, attended by a luxuriance of growing things, the flutter of song birds' wings and the jubilant caroling from their tiny throats.

All the windows of the old house were wide open and though the interior was dim and cool, long lines of light lay across all its homely furnishings. Everything had been swept and garnished until it shone, and Scilla, happy eyed, in a crisp new print, which was no inexpensive gown in those days, and a long white apron, stood in the open door, regarding the southern skies. She was thinking of those far-away battle-fields, deserted now, left to their dead and their memories, and in fancy, she beheld a pale-faced, ghostly army bivouacking there. What if Phil and Ephraim had camped with the slain on those fields that lie barren, devastated under the mild blue sky?

Ephraim was sitting, proud and happy, in the great arm-chair by the window, and she stopped as she passed him to restore a fan that had dropped from his still nerveless grasp. He took the fan from her, and held the hand that offered it captive.

"It's a great day, ain't it, 'Scilla?" he whispered, happily, "jest think of them bein' so kind to me, an' doin' so much for me. Why, I wan't nothin' never but a bound boy, anyway, an' Mis Marsh's ben like a mother to me — an' now, they're goin' to give this big party jest for Phil an' me. It orter be all Phil's. I hain't done nothin' to speak of, 'xcept cause 'em a sight o' trouble; but, by ginger, Phil, he was the genuine thing, an' here they be, doin' jest as much for me as they be for him. I tell you —" squeezing the hand he held, softly, "it ain't right."

"Oh, you jest let Mis Marsh alone." 'Scilla turned a radiant face to him, but her hand lay passive in his clasp. "You don't understand her, Ephrum, She's mighty glad, I can tell you, to git Phil home safe an' sound. I guess you'd be if you'd lost one boy same's she has. An'—an'—," blushing, "she thinks you was the one that found Phil an' so do I."

"I ain't. He'd a come home all right if I hadn't come out."

"Phil don't say so, himself. He says he would of died pretty soon of lonesomeness if you hadn't come. An'," laughing gaily, "he said he never seen a prettier face than yours was then."

She snatched her hand away and stood off out of his reach.

"I ain't so pretty now, be I 'Scilla?" he asked her teasingly, "I say, how'd you like for me to keep this yaller color all my life?"

The girl looked at him critically.

"Wal," she said, finally, "I wouldn't mind if you could be jest as well."

"Like yaller as well as you do red?" he supplemented.

"I didn't say so. It ain't your color I like," and she blushed furiously.

"That's right."

A quiet voice sounded just behind her, and she turned to look straight into Phil's eyes.

"Ephrum's ben tryin' to plague me," she said, "an' he thinks you're all too good to him here."

"We're not, that is, unless, as I strongly suspect, you have been extra good lately." Phil's eyes danced. "You know joy sometimes kills and Eph isn't a well man by any means."

'Scilla fled protestingly from the room but Ephraim looked up with a smile.

"You're jest right, Phil," he said, quietly, "an' 'twas your doin's too. Me an' 'Scilla are goin' to git married soon's I'm well, an' able to work agin. I took your advice, kep away from her, an' finally she come 'round all right herself."

He chuckled softly to himself.

"That's right," Phil assented, gravely, "it is about as my mother says. Girls are a good deal like calves — capering and kicking out to one side when you want to lead them, but following gently enough when you don't use any force."

Phil walked over to the window and looked out.

"They've begun to come," he called back to Ephraim, "I guess Mother asked the whole town. I can make out a long procession as far up the hill as I can see. We'll see all our old friends today, Eph."

"All but Hemilstross."

Ephraim turned his eyes away and looked out through the south window. "I kind of pity the poor cuss," he murmured.

"He wouldn't have shown you much pity if a stray bullet hadn't taken him off."

"That's so," assented Ephraim, gravely. And then — "I say, Phil, who's comin' now?"

"Well, as near as I can see, the first arrival will be Solon Wiseman, our old friend. Last in war, first in peace, and always first when there's to be anything eatable."

Ephraim gave a hoarse guffaw, very much like one of his old-time laughs, in which Phil joined.

Phil was looking his best. A neatly fitting suit of very light material suited his slender figure admirably, and though still somewhat pale, a healthy tinge was growing in his cheeks. As Solon Wiseman stumbled up the path, he stepped to the door with outstretched hand, which was instantly grasped by the newcomer.

"Howdy, Phil — howdy. You see I've come airy, but, as I sez to Solomon — when I was comin' along, I passed him — sez I — sez he — you're bound to git there, ain't ye? — an' I sez, sez I, 'better late than never. An' so I come right along.'"

He passed through into the sitting-room where Ephraim was frantically endeavoring to smother another burst of laughter at the inapt quotation.

"That's right."

Phil followed him into the house and proceeded to ply him with questions about the weather, the crops, and politics, each of which brought out some incongruousness in the mentality of the nondescript character whose origin no one knew, but whom no one

in Woodley Centre ever slighted, because he was unfortunate.

Presently, one by one, other neighbors began to arrive, drawn thither by the invitation of Sarah Marsh, to meet the two returned soldiers who were her especial charges. The simple townspeople had desired some demonstration to take place in the school-house, in recognition of the services Phil had rendered to his country; but to this he would not consent. He wanted to meet them all in the good old-fashioned way, just as he had done before he went away, but he had no desire for ostentation or that his deeds should be exploited or commented on. Hence, his mother had compromised on what she was pleased to call an "afternoon party," and to this arrangement he had given a hearty assent.

The house was pretty well filled when all of the guests had arrived. Hope came among the first, and directly following her, John Sherburne and his wife. Hope was very sweet in a gown of soft green barége, barred off with a stripe of silk, its fluffy skirt extended over an underskirt of sheerest white muslin, and "looped" up at intervals about the bottom with tiny green rosettes. A collar of soft white lace was turned away to show the rare whiteness of her shapely neck, and full undersleeves of the same muslin as the skirt, disclosed a glimpse beneath of the warm lifelike tinting of her slender arms. Her hair was draped softly on each side of its white parting, and fell in shining masses over her ears.

Something, a vague pain he could not define, clutched Phil's heart with cruel fingers when she came into the room, but he put it resolutely away and turned to shake the hand John Sherburne held out to him.

"This is a genuine pleasure," said the young clergyman, heartily, "to see you, Phil, back with us again, and looking so well. You must accept my thanks in behalf of all those here, for the valuable service you rendered and the prestige you brought to our hitherto unknown little town. And Phil—," he lowered his voice, sadly, "let me also present to you, as I have been deputed to, by these townspeople, our loving sympathy and our great distress at your bereavement."

Phil raised his eyes, with a frank look all those who knew him liked so well and trusted so fully, and replied:

"I thank you very much, John, and through you, all these people, for your expressions of sympathy and approbation. I can assure you I appreciate your kindness to my parents in my absence and to myself since my return. I want you all to have just as good a time this afternoon as you are capable of having. The house is yours," and with a low bow he included all those present.

"I want to speak to Ephraim, who, I observe, has not yet left his chair, and so, Phil, I will leave you to the watchful care of my wife. If she looks out for you as well as she did and has for me, it will leave you nothing to desire."

"I appreciate the honor," and Phil turned aside to shake the hand of the young minister's wife, and exchange badinage with her; for she had none of her husband's gravity and what some were pleased to call "heaviness."

There was a great buzzing of voices all over the house. Housewives were busy discussing the most approved ways for drying apples and preserving quinces, while the care of the babies and the house

played no inconsiderable part in the conversation. Solomon Penny had buttonholed Abel Marsh, gently insinuated him into a corner, and was discussing in the harsh, raucous tones to which all his townsmen were accustomed, some theory of reconstruction.

"Now, Uncle Abel," Phil heard him shouting, "I know there's some'd contend 't we can't git over this war in less than another twenty years, good. Look at the war debt. Look at the damage to business all over the country. Look at the great mass o' niggers that hev got to hev somethin' done with 'em—an' think o' the men, good, young men that went out to the war an' hain't come back. I contend that we sh'll hev to wait for a new generation to grow up."

"But meanwhile," the moderate voice of Nathan Drake interpolated, "we must do the best we can and with our new facilities, our renewed credit, the respect we have gained as a nation from other countries, and the broadening out of our trade with foreign ports which must come as a result of the world-wide notice we have gained, I contend a great deal will be accomplished, that will not have to wait for the future generation."

John Dale, who was standing near, flicked the inevitable fly from his boot heel as he remarked, "That's it. Solomon's always lookin' out to leave work for them that's comin' after him. He don't want to have it all to do himself. Ain't as anxious to work as he might be."

A ripple of laughter followed this sally, and Solomon took up the cudgel in his own defence. "Wal," he said, gruffly, "I don't know how you look at it, but it seems to me that this war hain't been no unmixed blessin'."

"Most all our blessin's 're mixed a little, fur as I can see." Sarah Marsh paused on her way from the best bedroom to the sitting-room. "Ef any of you 'xpect to git any unmixed in this world, you'll git dreadfully disappointed, I'm thinkin'."

"Most everythin's mixed, weather'n vittles too," remarked Solon Wiseman from his vantage ground near the pantry.

"You can mix 'em up some," volunteered Solomon Penny with a hoarse laugh.

"Ya-as," the cadaverous face of the village unfortunate blossomed into a smile, "I don't mind ef they are mixed."

"No, I guess not, ef they are all there," and John Dale laughed loudly.

Sarah Marsh bestowed a pitying smile on the attenuated figure. "Don't you fret, Solon," she said, sagely, "you're goin' to git somethin' good today, an' all you can eat, an' don't you let them fool you out of it neither."

"Be I, Mis Marsh?" He eyed her wistfully, "that'll be good," and all the rest of the afternoon he kept within close range of the good woman who had promised him such a feast.

The younger people inaugurated some popular games and their elders withdrew to the parlor while they played "drop the handkerchief," on the green carpet, and other good, romping games. When deep shadows fell far over the green and beautiful landscape, and the great sun dropped in ruddy clouds over the tops of the darkly wooded hills in the distance, Sarah Marsh called her aids about her and amid much chattering of tongues which reminded Solomon Penny of a grist mill, he said, they spread the long tables in the great cool kitchen, covered them with

snowy linen, and burdened them with the fatness of the land.

There were plates heaped high with luscious slices of brown and white bread that looked for all the world, so Ephraim said, as if they would "melt in your mouth;" cold roasted meats, crisp lettuce and radishes from the early garden, June peas, strawberries, glistening red in the gilt-band china dishes in which they were served, cream and fresh, warm milk to drink with the gingerbread Sarah Marsh was famous for.

With the healthy appetites they had acquired by long years of obedience to the simple laws of right living, the neighbors sat down and did full justice to the feast set before them, a feast, Nathan Drake assured his host and hostess, in an after dinner speech, "fit for the gods—garnished with the lacteal fluid and pure water from the spring, ambrosial nectar, such as never the heroes of mythical legends had tasted."

After this overflow of reason and wit, there were hearty hand shakings, each one present wanted—John Sherburne as spokesman said, "To take the hand that held the flag so high, that the bullets of hatred could not harm it."

"They want to see," said Solomon Penny, "jest how a real hero looked, what stuff he had to be made of, an' we want to git a glimpse of some one that has done somethin' not many of us would dared to hev done."

They filed past Ephraim's chair, wished him a speedy recovery, and made him tell them all about how he had found Phil in the prison pen, how he had nursed him through the fever, and how he had tried to put his own body between him and the blade Pro-

fessor Hemilstross had intended for Phil's heart. Ephraim had changed a good deal, from the lusty, awkward youth they had known so well, and they were not surprised when he told them, quietly and proudly, how he and 'Scilla were to be married just as soon as he was well enough to work.

"We'll all come, Eph," they assured him.

"I'm goin' to stay right here," said Ephraim, and his eyes shone happily, "Ant Sarah an' Uncle Abel say they can't git along nohow without us. You see, they're used to us, an' we're used to them, an' as long's they're willin' we're goin' to go right on workin' for 'em in the same old place."

"That's good," they assured him, and then, one by one, they filed out of the hospitable door of the old farmhouse across the iron threshold and the sunken doorstone, their hearts full of the benediction of friendliness and kindness they had imbibed within.

When they had all gone Phil turned to Hope. She was throwing on the shawl of crepe she had worn and putting on a little sailor hat of white Milan, trimmed with green velvet, arranging over her ears the coquettish rosettes that dangled from its brim. Again that great wave of longing surged through his heart, but he was silent. He thought of Eph and 'Scilla, so happy in their simple, unsophisticated way, and he almost envied them the placid future he knew would be theirs.

His was to be the lonely life. When his parents were gone, there would be nothing for him, absolutely nothing but to live alone and unloved. Better had he fallen there on the battle-field, with the glorious stars and stripes around him, than to live until he should be forgotten, the saddest fate life offers.

Hope arranged her wraps in silence. Then she turned with a smile to him. "Come, Phil, I am ready."

She had exacted this trifling service from him, unthinkingly, so many, many times, never dreaming it had cost him so much. He took up the light hat that matched his suit, and followed her out through the kitchen, where, in the dusk, his mother and 'Scilla were washing dishes.

"Good-bye, Aunt Sarah," she called out cheerfully.

"What? You goin' so quick? Wal, good-bye," and Sarah Marsh turned back to the pantry with a great pile of plates.

The barn doors were wide open when they passed through the yard. Through the grim shapes of the falling twilight that invested the interior, they could hear the stamping of horses, the chewing of the cattle, and the lusty voice of Abel Marsh in the dimness, calling out, "So, Boss! so Boss!" or "Hey there, stand around there, Roan, will ye?"

Hope called to him, "Good-night," which he returned with a bluff, "Good-night, leetle gal, come up an' see us agin," from the wide and yawning doorway.

Then they went down the winding roadway, in the soft half lights, their feet crushing the lushness of the grassy growth at every step and talking of what they felt not — of the party, those present, Ephraim and 'Scilla, and anything but that which they ought. And, as they walked, the full June moon, than which there is no more beautiful sight, swung into the amber seas of the cloudless skies, and its light drenched the highway beneath their feet, turning its sands to molten gold that ran a yellow stream, on and on forever,

bathed the roses growing by the side of the road, in its mellow glory, so that they yielded up their hearts to its effulgence and touched the simple dwellings they were passing with the wand of an alchemist.

And presently they stood before the door of Hope's home.

Both hearts were too full for speech, and they waited there in silence, drinking in long inspirations of the beauty of the night. Then, after a little, the musical cadence of her voice just touched the air and glided to his senses.

"I shall never forget this night," she said, "I wish it might last forever."

Something within him stirred to life at the sweet sounds, so perfectly in accord with the beauty about it, and glancing at the girl's pure face, framed in the mistiness of the moonbeams, grim reason left her throne, and the great flood tide of his love and his longing swayed him.

"Hope," he breathed, and she listened, enthralled by the mastery of his pleading, "I know I am unworthy—more unworthy than when I went, at your bidding, to do battle for my country and the right. I went then, so that you should not despise me, brand me as a coward, one who would 'wait for the draft,' and go only when forced. If I fought bravely your face went before me into every battle. If I saved the flag from defeat and disgrace, your voice urged me to it. I fought, not for my country and her glory, though I loved them, but for you. I bled for you, and would have died for your approval. And yet, strange as it may seem, I tried to kill that love, to stamp it out, to deny it the right of existence. I did not want you, Hope, unless you loved me. But my love, my longing, stronger than life, or war,

or death, has overpowered me, torn down all my defenses, put reason to rout, and Hope, I am helpless. Hope, is there, tell me—any gleam of light for me? Will you take my life, let it be lived out for you, and make of me what you will?"

The passionate tones died away on the perfect stillness of the night air, but in the girl's face, while he had been speaking, had dawned a transformation. The beautiful glow that had invaded the realm of nature had been supplemented by another glow, a light that never was on land or sea, and when he had finished speaking she turned to him a glorified, a transfigured face; for at last she too had been face to face with her soul and the truth—and she understood.

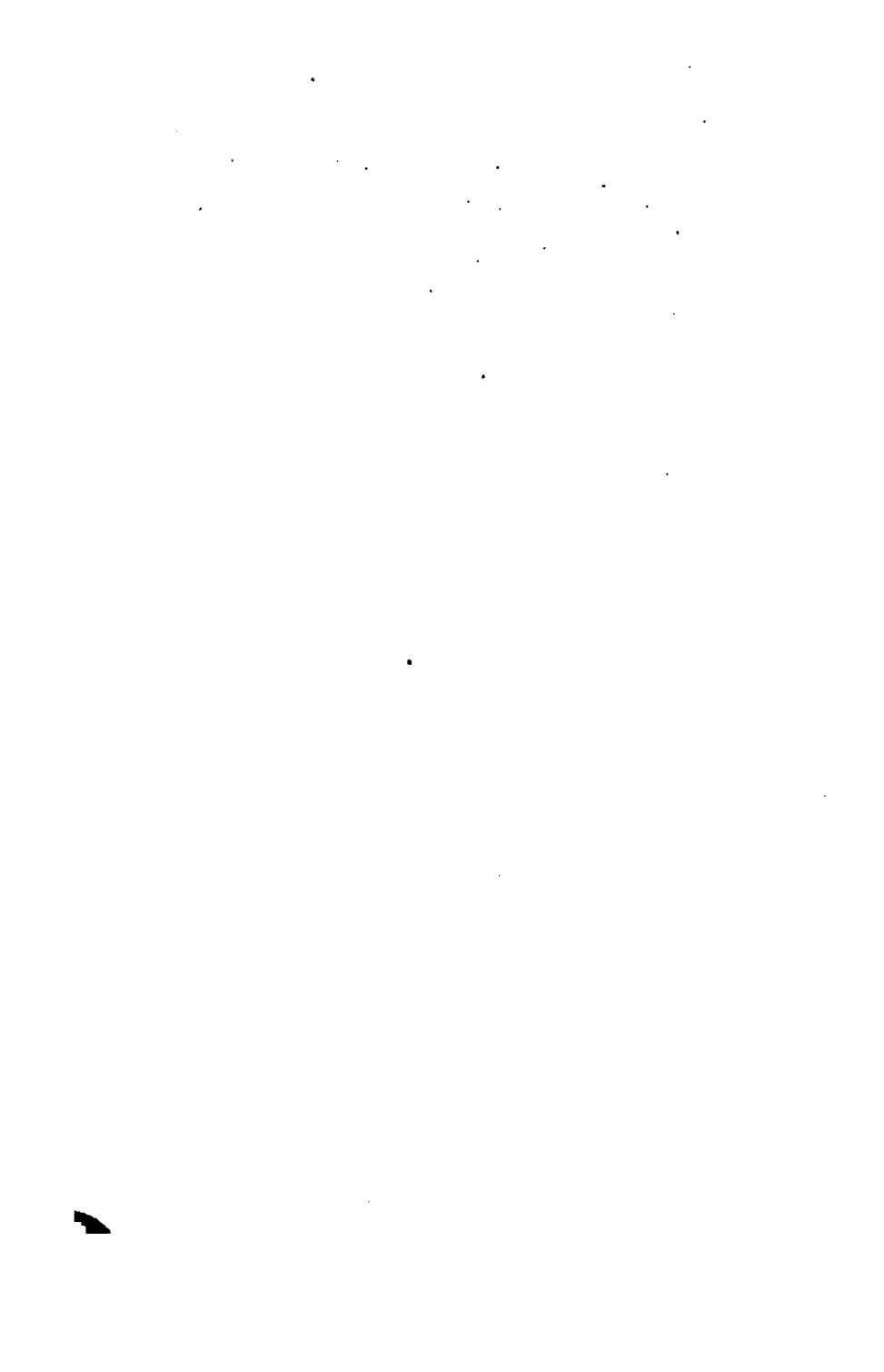
And while no echo stirred in the unbroken calm that had fallen over the landscape, and only a gentle ripple of night air lifted the rose leaves, she breathed softly her answer.

"Yes, Phil, — I will try."

THE END







r





1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

